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THE TRAVEL BOOKS OF
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Books by W. Somerset Maugham

LIZA OF LAMBETH
MRS. CRADDOCK
THE MAGICIAN
OF HUMAN BONDAGE
THE MOON AND SIXPENCE
THE TREMBLING OF A LEAF
ON A CHINESE SCREEN
THE PAINTED VEIL
THE CASUARINA TREE
ASHENDEN
THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PARLOUR
CAKES AND ALF
FIRST PERSON SINGULAR
THE NARROW CORNER
AH KING
DON FERNANDO
COSMOPOLITANS
THEATRE
THE SUMMING UP
CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY
BOOKS AND YOU
THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE
UP AT THE VILLA
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THE TRAVEL BOOKS

THE TRAVEL BOOKS

of

W. SOMERSET
MAUGHAM



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Contents

ON A CHINESE SCREEN (*148 pages*)

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PARLOUR (*170 pages*)

DON FERNANDO (*146 pages*)

PREFACE

THE reader will find in this volume, scattered among incidents of travel, some of the stories, perhaps a dozen in all, that he may already have read in the three volumes in which are included pretty well all the stories I have ever written. The books here contained were written many years ago. *On a Chinese Screen* was published in 1922, *The Gentleman in the Parlour* in 1930, and *Don Fernando* in 1935. They have lost the flavour of actuality, and I never supposed that they would be reprinted. When I came to sort out the material for a complete collection of my short stories, it occurred to me that in *On a Chinese Screen* and in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* there were narratives which with a little arrangement might suitably find a place in it. That is not to say that they were fictional. They were straightforward recitals (almost what the French call *reportages*) of the impressions made upon me by the people I came in contact with and the circumstances of their lives as they disclosed them to me. If, with the addition of a few lines of introduction, the pieces I had written could well pass for short stories, that is because at one period of my life almost everyone I met, almost everything that happened to me and every incident I witnessed or was told of, shaped itself into a short story. In *On a Chinese Screen* and *The Gentleman in the Parlour* I was not writing fiction, I was relating facts; indeed, far from embroidering on the facts to make them more effective, as the writer of fiction is justified in doing, I took pains to modify them when I thought they were too fantastic to be credible. Let me give an example: In one of the chapters in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* I tell of a trip I took in a coasting steamer in order to get from Bangkok in Siam to Kep in Cambodia. My fellow-passengers were the oddest, the most absurd lot of people I had ever come across. They might have been characters in an uproarious farce. They were very friendly—with the exception of an Italian tenor who sat by himself in the bows, and at night, accompanying himself on a guitar, sang at the top of his voice fragments of opera. I briefly described him, but omitted to mention that he was a murderer fleeing from justice and seeking a refuge from extra-

dition, since I thought it so improbable that I could not expect the reader to believe it. The present volume would have lost much of what interest it may have if, because they have recently appeared in my collected short stories, I had left out these true narratives; for indeed they belong to it and complete its shape.

On a Chinese Screen is not a book, but the material for a book. Until age mitigated my *wanderlust*, I liked to travel. I liked the sensation it gave me of freedom from responsibility. To me then it seemed that time never spreads out so spaciouly before you as on a journey and, though perhaps you do little of what you had a mind to, you have the feeling that you have leisure for everything. You have long empty hours that you can fritter away without the uneasy consciousness that time is flying and there is not a moment to waste. Though I think the traveller a fool who does not secure for himself such comfort as is possible, I can very well do without it. I like a good dinner, but in those days I could enjoy the roughest and (what is worse) the most monotonous fare. In the South Seas I have eaten Hamburger steak day after day with unimpaired appetite (though I admit that when I returned to San Francisco and was offered one, my stomach rose at the sight); and on an island in the Malay Archipelago I have eaten bananas for three meals a day because there was little else to eat. Nor have I ever looked upon bananas with longing since. I have slept very comfortably on a mat in a native house in Savaii and luxuriously in an open boat on a Chinese river. I have even enjoyed sleeping in a launch on sacks of copra, and it would be hard to find anything more lumpy. But how exquisite were those starry nights under the Southern Cross! I liked to meet people whom I would never meet again. I found no one boring whom I could expect to see but once in my life. It was interesting to guess what kind of a person he was and to compare him with others of the same kind whom I had met before. For the most part, people sort themselves into a small variety of types, and you have the amusement of recognising the traits and idiosyncrasies that you anticipate. And just as you will sometimes see an effect of nature that you know from the pictures of a certain painter, so you will run across persons that you have read of in books. The Kipling character, for instance, was then by no means uncommon in the East. I do not know if he was a descendant of the men and women Rudyard Kipling described in the India of forty years before, or if he had

formed himself on a diligent perusal of those good stories. It was comic to hear him use the well-known phrases and to see him, as though it were natural to him, entertain the attitude towards the world which even then was so dated. Then there was the excitement now and then, very rarely of course, of coming upon someone who was different from anyone you had ever known. You found him in unexpected places, on board some unseaworthy tramp, away in a walled town on the borders of Tibet, or on a coconut plantation in the Aroe Islands. Solitude, an unusual life, have given him the opportunity to develop on his own lines without the hindrance of our Western civilisation, which forces upon people, at least outwardly (and, alas, how greatly is the inner life influenced by the outer!) a common shape. The man may not be very intelligent. He may even seem a little crazy. He may be immoral, dishonest, coarse, vulgar and rude; but, by heavens, he's queer. He seems almost to belong to a different species. If you are interested in human nature your heart leaps. You feel, as you talk to him, the same sort of exhilarated repose as you feel when you listen to great music. There is something heartening in such persons. Because, I suppose with nature to help, they have made themselves something distinct from the common run, they seem to possess the world. It is an instrument they use to create their uniqueness.

I went to China in 1920. Some years before, the Ching dynasty had been overthrown, and the country, under a military dictatorship, was sufficiently peaceful to allow the traveller to go where he would. I did not keep a diary, for that is a thing I have never been able to do since I was ten, but I made notes of the people and places that excited my interest. I vaguely thought they might be useful for stories or a novel. They mounted up, and it occurred to me that I might make them into a connected narrative of my journey. On getting home I sorted them out. It was not easy to make head or tail of them, for few of them were written in pen and ink; they were for the most part jotted 'down on yellow wrapping-paper bought by the wayside, in pencil, when, tired of walking, I was being carried by my bearers in a chair, or on my knee in a sampan. But when I got them into some sort of order, it seemed to me that they had a freshness, for they were made when the impressions were vivid, which they might lose if I elaborated them into such a narrative as I had intended. I thought it enough if I made them a little more succinct, and if I tried, as

far as I could, to remedy the carelessness and slipshod character of hasty writing. I hoped they would give the reader who cared to make some use of his imagination a truthful, and perhaps lively, picture of the China I had seen.

The Gentleman in the Parlour is not, like *On a Chinese Screen*, the result of an accident. I took the journey it describes because I wanted to; but I had from the beginning the intention of writing a book about it. I think it is very well for a novelist now and then to give himself a rest from writing fiction. It is a dreary business to write a novel once a year, as many authors must do to earn their year's keep, or for fear that, if they remain silent, they will be forgotten. It is unlikely, however fertile their imagination, that they will always have in mind a theme that so urgently demands expression that they cannot help but write; it is unlikely, too, that they will be able to create characters, fresh and vivid, that they have not themselves used before. If they have the story-teller's gift and know their craft, they will probably turn out an acceptable piece of fiction, but it is only by good luck that it will be anything more. Every work of fiction that an author produces should be the record of a spiritual adventure of his own. This is a counsel of perfection. The professional author cannot hope always to follow it; he must often content himself with the smaller merit of achieving a workmanlike piece. But it is one that it is well for him to bear in mind. Though the variety of human nature is immense, so that it might seem that the writer of fiction need never want for models on which to create his characters, he can only deal with that part of it which is in accordance with his own temperament. He must put himself in the shoes of his characters, but there are shoes he cannot get into. There are people so alien to him that he cannot come to grips with them. When he deals with them he will describe them from the outside, and observation divorced from empathy can seldom create a living being. That is why novelists tend to reproduce the same types; they astutely change the sex, the station, the age, the appearance of their characters; but if you look at them closely you will find that they are the same persons reappearing in different guise. No doubt the greater the novelist, the larger number of persons he is capable of creating; but even with the greatest, the number is determined by his own limitations. There is only one way in which he can to some extent cope with the difficult situation: he

can change himself. Here time is the prime agent. The author is fortunate who can wait till this has effected such a change in him that he can see what is spread before him with fresh eyes. He is the variable, and the changing quantity gives an altered value to the symbols with which he is equated. But change of scene also—on one condition—can do much. I have known writers who made adventurous journeys, but took along with them their house in London, their circle of friends, their English interests and their reputation; and were surprised on getting home to find that they were the same persons as when they went. Not thus can a writer profit by a journey. When he sets out on his travels, the one person he must leave behind is himself.

I had enjoyed writing *On a Chinese Screen*. I thought I would like to try my hand again on the same sort of subject, but on a more elaborate scale, and in a form on which I could impose a definite pattern. Hence *The Gentleman in the Parlour*. It was an exercise in style. In a novel the style is necessarily influenced by the matter, and a homogeneous manner is hardly practical. The description of a state of mind demands a different mode of expression from the recital of an incident; and dialogue, which should at least give a reasonable impression of current speech, cannot but preclude a uniformity of effect. A tragic passage needs a different manner again from a comic one. Sometimes your narrative requires a conversational mode, with free use of slang, and even of language that is deliberately careless; at other times it asks for periods as stately as you can make them. The result must be a hodge-podge. There are authors who attach so much importance to beauty of language, by which, alas, they too often mean a florid vocabulary and the purple patch, that they force their material, regardless of its nature, into a uniform mould. Sometimes they go so far as to make even their dialogue conform to it and ask you to read conversations in which the speakers address one another in balanced and carefully composed sentences. So life eludes them. There is no air and you pant for breath. It is, of course, out of the question to be funny in this way; but that disturbs them little, for they seldom possess a sense of humour. It is a trait, indeed, that they regard with impatience. The better plan in a novel is to let the matter dictate the manner. The style of a novel is best when, like the clothes of a well-dressed man, it is unnoticed.

But if you like language for its own sake, if it amuses you to

string words together in the order that most pleases you, so as to produce at least a semblance of beauty, the essay or the book of travel gives you an opportunity. Here prose may be cultivated for its own sake. You can manipulate your material so that the harmony you seek is plausible. Your style can flow like a broad, placid river, and the reader is borne along on its bosom with security; he need fear no shoals, no adverse currents, rapids or rock-strewn gorges. The danger, of course, is that he will be lulled to sleep, and so not observe the pleasant sights along the bank with which you have sought to divert him. The reader must judge for himself whether in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* I have avoided it. I beg him only to remember that there is no language more difficult to write than English. No one ever learns all that there is to be known about it. In the long history of our literature it would be difficult to find more than six persons who have written it faultlessly.

Don Fernando can only by courtesy be called a travel book, since, though it would never have been written but for my long sojourns in Spain, it deals for the most part not with the cities the traveller may visit nor with the famous sights that demand his attention and extort his wonder, but with excursions into Spain's Golden Age. So great is the fascination of that country that it is not a gross exaggeration to say that nearly anyone who has been there any length of time, and can wield a pen or pound a typewriter, has found himself impelled to write a book about it. Some of these productions have become minor classics. Borrow's *The Bible in Spain*, Theophile Gautier's *Voyage en Espagne*, Ford's *Gatherings from Spain*, written during the first half of the nineteenth century, though they describe conditions that have long since ceased to exist, can still be read with pleasure. They have a romantic glamour that the writer of today cannot hope to recapture. Since then innumerable books have been published. Of those that I have read, the most useful is H. V. Morton's *A Traveller in Spain*. It gives the reader all the information he needs to make a journey in Spain instructive as well as delightful. This little book of mine can make no such pretensions; yet it may have an interest to anyone who has paid Spain more than a hurried visit and has succumbed to its lure, for the Golden Age, though long since a thing of the past, is still a living memory. It confronts you at every turn. It pervades the Escorial; it is with you at Avila

and Salamanca; it animated the plays of Lope de Vega and Calderon, which are on occasion still acted in Madrid; it is there for you to see in the pictures of El Greco and Velasquez. To many a Spaniard, to far more than you would suppose, that moment of glory is a support and an inspiration. Now and then a trivial incident, a casual remark, will bring it so close to you that you are dazzled.

On one occasion, I was lunching with a friend of mine in Madrid, and he happened to ask me what I had been doing that morning. I told him that as usual I had spent it at the Prado.

"Did you look at the portrait of my ancestor, the Count-Duke of Olivares?" he said.

"Of course," I answered.

He pointed to a suit of armour, elaborately damascened, that stood against the wall.

"That is the armour that Velasquez painted him in."

A thrilling moment!

When you read the plays and the novels that were written during the Golden Age, the lives of the saints and sinners, the history of the period, you gain presently a vivid impression of what those men were who, by means of clever diplomacy and profitable marriages, had become masters of half Europe, and by force of arms had added vast territories to the crown of Spain. They were proud, punctilious and elaborately courteous, passionate, brutal and ruthless, fiercely religious, but fond of a joke, especially a bawdy or a cruel one; and when their passions were not roused, gracious, charitable and kindly. I do not believe the Spaniards have greatly changed. Essentially they are the same people as they were then. Though they may not like the foreigner, they will take care not to let him see it. Gentle and common alike, they are polite. They are the politest people in Europe. Though I have spent many months in Seville, it is a difficult place to find one's way in, and one day I got hopelessly lost. I stopped a workman in overalls and asked him to direct me to where I wanted to go. He did, and added: "Forgive me if I don't take you there myself, but I'm on a job and must get back to it." I could only apologise for having detained him. One of the most charming traits you find in the Spaniards is the tenderness with which they treat children; however troublesome they are, they seem never to lose patience with them. You would think their indulgence and good humour were inexhaustible. But they can be

ruthless still. A friend of mine, the owner of large estates in the North of Spain, told me a story which is here apposite. It was about a man, José-Maria by name; he was middle-aged, for his station fairly well-off, a quiet, respectable fellow and a good workman. He was so rash as to marry an uncommonly pretty girl twenty years younger than himself and, as might perhaps have been expected, it was not long before she took a lover. This was a young man called Antonio. In a small village everyone knows what everyone else is doing and soon the affair was the subject of common gossip. It may be that Antonio, being a Spaniard, was boastful, and not displeased that his conquest should be known. Presently the only person in the community who remained ignorant of it was the husband. The whole thing was so flagrant that it seemed impossible that he should not suspect it. It began to be thought that he knew quite well what was going on, but, in view of the disparity of age between himself and his wife, had decided to ignore it. He was a good man and well liked, but the cuckold has through the ages been an object of ridicule, and many a ribald joke was made at his expense. Months passed.

Both husband and wife went out to work early in the morning, he on one job, she on another, and came back to their little house at noon for their midday meal. Since José-Maria got in before his wife, he prepared it. One day they sat down in the kitchen, and he set on the table a savoury dish of rice. His wife began to eat it with good appetite. When she had finished, she pushed the plate back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"That was good, José-Maria," she said. "I've never eaten anything better. What was the meat in it?"

"Antonio's kidneys," he answered.

For a moment she didn't know what he meant; then the ghastly truth flashed across her mind, she sprang to her feet and fell to the floor in a dead faint. José-Maria went up the short flight of stairs to their bedroom to fetch the bag he had already packed. He shut and locked the door of the house behind him and walked along the street to catch the bus that went to Bilbao. He had timed everything to the minute. At Bilbao he went on board the ship that was about to sail for Argentina.

It was a grim story, and I could not but think that I could make something of it. I turned it over in my mind and had half a mind to write it. Fortunately I didn't, since it would have got me into trouble. Some time afterwards, I went to Italy. I hadn't read the

Decameron since my first visit there when I was twenty, and I thought it high time for me to read it again. So I took it with me. I read the charming introduction once more, and then story after story. Everyone knows the plan on which they are written. A group of friends, fleeing from the plague in Florence, entertain themselves by telling a set of ten stories on succeeding days. The ninth story on the third day tells how Messer Guiglielmo Rossiglione, having killed his wife's lover, Messer Guiglielmo Guardastagno, gives her his heart to eat. When this is made known to her, she throws herself out of the window and dies. It was in essentials the same story as my friend had told me. I was pretty certain that he had never read the *Decameron*, and, knowing him well, I was convinced that he had told me what he knew to have happened. I could only suppose that nature was up to its old trick of copying art. But it is odd that in this case it should have waited five hundred years before doing so.

Now, having nothing more to say, I can but invite the reader to read the following pages.

ON A CHINESE SCREEN

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ON A CHINESE SCREEN

I

THE RISING OF THE CURTAIN

YOU come to the row of hovels that leads to the gate of the city. They are built of dried mud and so dilapidated that you feel a breath of wind will lay them flat upon the dusty earth from which they have been made. A string of camels, heavily laden, steps warily past you. They wear the disdainful air of profiteers forced to traverse a world in which many people are not so rich as they. A little crowd, tattered in their blue clothes, is gathered about the gate and it scatters as a youth in a pointed cap gallops up on a Mongolian pony. A band of children are chasing a lame dog and they throw clods of mud at it. Two stout gentlemen in long black gowns of figured silk and silk jackets stand talking to one another. Each holds a little stick, perched on which, with a string attached to its leg, is a little bird. They have brought out their pets for an airing and in friendly fashion compare their merits. Now and then the birds give a flutter into the air, the length of the string, and return quickly to their perch. The two Chinese gentlemen, smiling, look at them with soft eyes. Rude boys cry out at the foreigner in a shrill and scornful voice. The city wall, crumbling, old and crenellated, looks like the city wall in an old picture of some Palestinish town of the Crusaders.

You pass through the gateway into a narrow street lined with shops: many of them with their elegant lattice work, red and gold, and their elaborate carving, have a peculiar ruined magnificence, and you imagine that in their dark recesses are sold all manner of strange wares of the fabulous East. A great multitude surges along the uneven narrow footwalk or in the deep-set street; and coolies, bearing heavy loads, shout for way in short sharp cries. Hawkers with guttural sound call their wares.

And now at a sedate pace, drawn by a sleek mule, comes a Peking cart. Its hood is bright blue and its great wheels are studded with nails. The driver sits with dangling legs on a shaft. It is evening and the sun sets red behind the yellow, steep, and fantastic roof of a temple. The Peking cart, the blind in front

drawn down, passes silently and you wonder who it is that sits cross-legged within. Perhaps it is a scholar, all the learning of the classics at his finger-ends, bound on a visit to a friend with whom he will exchange elaborate compliments and discuss the golden age of Tang and Sung which can return no more; perhaps it is a singing girl in splendid silks and richly embroidered coat, with jade in her black hair, summoned to a party so that she may sing a little song and exchange elegant repartee with young blades cultured enough to appreciate wit. The Peking cart disappears into the gathering darkness: it seems to carry all the mystery of the East.

II

MY LADY'S PARLOUR

"I REALLY think I can make something of it," she said.

She looked about her briskly, and the light of the creative imagination filled her eyes with brightness.

It was an old temple, a small one, in the city, which she had taken and was turning into a dwelling house. It had been built for a very holy monk by his admirers three hundred years before, and here in great piety, practising innumerable austerities, he had passed his declining days. For long after in memory of his virtue the faithful had come to worship, but in course of time funds had fallen very low and at last the two or three monks that remained were forced to leave. It was weather-beaten and the green tiles of the roof were overgrown with weeds. The raftered ceiling was still beautiful with its faded gold dragons on a faded red; but she did not like a dark ceiling, so she stretched a canvas across and papered it. Needing air and sunlight, she cut two large windows on one side. She very luckily had some blue curtains which were just the right size. Blue was her favourite colour: it brought out the colour of her eyes. Since the columns, great red sturdy columns, oppressed her a little she papered them with a very nice paper which did not look Chinese at all. She was lucky also with the paper with which she covered the walls. It was bought in a native shop, but really it might have come from Sandersons'; it was a very nice pink stripe and it made the place look cheerful at once. At the back was a recess in which had stood a great lacquer table and behind it an image of the Buddha in a state of eternal meditation. Here generations of believers had burned their tapers and prayed, some for this temporal benefit or that, some for release from the returning burden of earthly existence; and this seemed to her the very place for an American stove. She was obliged to buy her carpet in China, but she managed to get one that looked so like an Axminster that you would hardly know the difference. Of course, being hand-made, it had not quite the smoothness of the English article, but it was a very decent substitute. She was able to buy a very nice lot of furniture from a member of the Legation who was leaving the country for a post in Rome, and she

got a nice bright chintz from Shanghai to make loose covers with. Fortunately she had quite a number of pictures, wedding presents and some even that she had bought herself, for she was very artistic, and these gave the room a cosy look. She needed a screen, and here there was no help for it, she had to buy a Chinese one, but, as she very cleverly said, you might perfectly well have a Chinese screen in England. She had a great many photographs, in silver frames, one of them of a Princess of Schleswig-Holstein, and one of the Queen of Sweden, both signed, and these she put on the grand piano, for they give a room an air of being lived in. Then, having finished, she surveyed her work with satisfaction.

"Of course it doesn't look like a room in London," she said, "but it might quite well be a room in some nice place in England, Cheltenham, say, or Tunbridge Wells."

III

THE MONGOL CHIEF

HEAVEN knows from what mysterious distance he had come. He rode down the winding pathway from the high Mongolian plateau with the mountains, barren, stony, and inaccessible, stretching on all sides, an impenetrable barrier; he rode down past the temple that guarded the head of the pass till he came to the old river bed which was the gateway into China. It was hedged in by the foothills brilliant under the morning sun, with sharp shadows; and the innumerable traffic of the centuries had formed on that stony floor a rough road. The air was keen and clear, the sky was blue. Here all the year round, from daybreak till sundown, passed an unending stream, camels in caravan bearing the brick tea to Urga seven hundred miles away and so to Siberia, long lines of wagons drawn by placid bullocks, and little carts in twos and threes behind stout ponies; and in the contrary direction, into China, again camels in caravan bringing hides to the markets of Peking, and wagons in long procession. Now a mob of horses went by and then a flock of goats. But his eyes did not rest on the various scene. He seemed not to notice that others were travelling the pass. He was accompanied by his henchmen, six or seven of them, somewhat bedraggled it is true, on sorry nags, but they had a truculent air. They ambled along in a slovenly bunch. He was dressed in a black silk coat and black silk trousers thrust into his long riding boots with their turned-up toes, and on his head he wore the high sable cap of his country. He held himself erect, riding a little ahead of his followers, proudly, and as he rode, his head high and his eyes steady, you wondered if he thought that down this pass in days gone by his ancestors had ridden, ridden down upon the fertile plain of China where rich cities lay ready to their looting.

IV

THE ROLLING STONE

I HEARD his extraordinary story before I saw him and I expected someone of striking appearance. It seemed to me that anyone who had gone through such singular experiences must have in his outer man something singular too. But I found a person in whose aspect there was nothing remarkable. He was smaller than the average, somewhat frail, sunburned, with hair beginning to turn grey though he was still under thirty, and brown eyes. He looked like anybody else, and you might see him half a dozen times before remembering who he was. If you had happened upon him behind the counter of a department store or on a stool in a broker's office you would have thought him perfectly in place. But you would have noticed him as little as you noticed the counter or the stool. There was so little in him to attract attention that in the end it became intriguing: his face, empty of significance, reminded you of the blank wall of a Manchu palace, in a sordid street, behind which you knew were painted courtyards, carved dragons, and heaven knows what subtle intricacy of life.

For his whole career was remarkable. The son of a veterinary surgeon, he had been a reporter in the London police courts and then had gone as steward on board a merchant ship to Buenos Aires. There he had deserted and somehow or other had worked his way across South America. From a port in Chile he managed to get to the Marquesas, where for six months he had lived on the natives always ready to offer hospitality to a white man, and then, begging a passage on a schooner to Tahiti, had shipped to Amoy as second mate of an old tub which carried Chinese labour to the Society Islands.

That was nine years before I met him and since then he had lived in China. First he got work with the B. A. T. Company, but after a couple of years he found it monotonous; and having acquired a certain knowledge of the language he entered the employment of a firm which distributed patent medicines through the length and breadth of the land. For three years he wandered in province after province, selling pills, and at the end of it had saved eight hundred dollars. He cut himself adrift once more.

He began then the most remarkable of his adventures. He set out from Peking on a journey right across the country, travelling in the guise of a poor Chinaman, with his roll of bedding, his Chinese pipe, and his tooth-brush. He stayed in the Chinese inns, sleeping on the kang huddled up with fellow-wayfarers, and ate the Chinese food. This alone is no mean feat. He used the train but little, going for the most part on foot, by cart, or by river. He went through Shensi and Shansi; he walked on the windy plateaus of Mongolia and risked his life in barbaric Turkestan; he spent long weeks with the nomads of the desert and travelled with the caravans that carried the brick tea across the arid wilderness of Gobi. At last, four years later, having spent his last dollar, he reached Peking once more.

He set about looking for a job. The easiest way to earn money seemed to write, and the editor of one of the English papers in China offered to take a series of articles on his journey. I suppose his only difficulty was to choose from the fulness of his experience. He knew much which he was perhaps the only Englishman to know. He had seen all manner of things, quaint, impressive, terrible, amusing, and unexpected. He wrote twenty-four articles. I will not say that they were unreadable, for they showed a careful and a sympathetic observation; but he had seen everything at haphazard, as it were, and they were but the material of art. They were like the catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, a mine to the imaginative man, but the foundation of literature rather than literature itself. He was the field naturalist who patiently collects an infinity of facts, but has no gift for generalisation: they remain facts that await the synthesis of minds more complicated than his. He collected neither plants nor beasts, but men. His collection was unrivalled, but his knowledge of it slender.

When I met him I sought to discern how the variety of his experience had affected him; but though he was full of anecdote, a jovial, friendly creature, willing to talk at length of all he had seen, I could not discover that any of his adventures had intimately touched him. The instinct to do all the queer things he had done showed that there was in him a streak of queerness. The civilised world irked him and he had a passion to get away from the beaten trail. The oddities of life amused him. He had an insatiable curiosity. But I think his experiences were merely of the body and were never translated into experiences of the soul. Perhaps that is why at bottom you felt he was commonplace. The in-

significance of his mien was a true index to the insignificance of his soul. Behind the blank wall was blankness.

That was certainly why with so much to write about he wrote tediously, for in writing the important thing is less richness of material than richness of personality.

THE CABINET MINISTER

HE received me in a long room looking on to a sandy garden. The roses withered on the stunted bushes and the great old trees flagged forlorn. He sat me down on a square stool at a square table and took his seat in front of me. A servant brought cups of flowered tea and American cigarettes. He was a thin man, of the middle height, with thin, elegant hands; and through his gold-rimmed spectacles he looked at me with large, dark, and melancholy eyes. He had the look of a student or of a dreamer. His smile was very sweet. He wore a brown silk gown and over it a short black silk jacket, and on his head a billy-cock hat.

"Is it not strange," he said, with his charming smile, "that we Chinese wear this gown because three hundred years ago the Manchus were horsemen?"

"Not so strange," I retorted, "as that because the English won the battle of Waterloo Your Excellency should wear a bowler."

"Do you think that is why I wear it?"

"I could easily prove it."

Since I was afraid that his exquisite courtesies would prevent him from asking me how, I hastened in a few well-chosen words to do so.

He took off his hat and looked at it with the shadow of a sigh. I glanced round the room. It had a green Brussels carpet, with great flowers on it, and round the walls were highly carved black-wood chairs. From a picture rail hung scrolls on which were writings by the great masters of the past, and to vary these, in bright gold frames, were oil paintings which in the 'nineties might very well have been exhibited in the Royal Academy. The Minister did his work at an American roll-top desk.

He talked to me with melancholy of the state of China. A civilisation, the oldest the world had known, was now being ruthlessly swept away. The students who came back from Europe and from America were tearing down what endless generations had built up, and they were placing nothing in its stead. They had no love of their country, no religion, no reverence. The temples, deserted by worshipper and priest, were falling into decay

and presently their beauty would be nothing but a memory.

But then, with a gesture of his thin, aristocratic hands, he put the subject aside. He asked me whether I would care to see some of his works of art. We walked round the room and he showed me priceless porcelains, bronzes, and Tang figures. There was a horse from a grave in Honan which had the grace and the exquisite modelling of a Greek work. On a large table by the side of his desk was a number of rolls. He chose one and holding it at the top gave it to me to unroll. It was a picture, of some early dynasty, of mountains seen through fleecy clouds, and with smiling eyes he watched my pleasure as I looked. The picture was set aside and he showed me another and yet another. Presently I protested that I could not allow a busy man to waste his time on me, but he would not let me go. He brought out picture after picture. He was a connoisseur. He was pleased to tell me the schools and periods to which they belonged and neat anecdotes about their painters.

"I wish I could think it was possible for you to appreciate my greatest treasures," he said, pointing to the scrolls that adorned his walls. "Here you have examples of the most perfect calligraphies of China."

"Do you like them better than paintings?" I asked.

"Infinitely. Their beauty is more chaste. There is nothing meretricious in them. But I can quite understand that a European would have difficulty in appreciating so severe and so delicate an art. Your taste in Chinese things tends a little to the grotesque, I think."

He produced books of paintings and I turned their leaves. Beautiful things! With the dramatic instinct of the collector he kept to the last the book by which he set most store. It was a series of little pictures of birds and flowers, roughly done with a few strokes, but with such a power of suggestion, with so great a feeling for nature and such a playful tenderness, that it took your breath away. There were sprigs of plum-blossom that held in their dainty freshness all the magic of the spring; there were sparrows in whose ruffled plumage were the beat and the tremor of life. It was the work of a great artist.

"Will these American students ever produce anything like this?" he asked with a rueful smile.

But to me the most charming part of it was that I knew all the time that he was a rascal. Corrupt, inefficient, and unscrupulous,

he let nothing stand in his way. He was a master of the squeeze. He had acquired a large fortune by the most abominable methods. He was dishonest, cruel, vindictive, and venal. He had certainly had a share in reducing China to the desperate plight which he so sincerely lamented. But when he held in his hand a little vase of the colour of lapis lazuli his fingers seemed to curl about it with a charming tenderness, his melancholy eyes caressed it as they looked, and his lips were slightly parted as though with a sigh of desire.

VI

DINNER PARTIES

1. Legation Quarter

THE Swiss director of the Banque Sino-Argentine was announced. He came with a large, handsome wife, who displayed her opulent charms so generously that it made you a little nervous. It was said that she had been a *cocotte*, and an English maiden lady (in salmon-pink satin and beads) who had come early greeted her with a thin and frigid smile. The Minister of Guatemala and the *Chargé d'Affaires* of Montenegro entered together. The *Chargé d'Affaires* was in a state of extreme agitation; he had not understood that it was an official function, he thought he had been asked to dine *en petit comité*, and he had not put on his Orders. And there was the Minister of Guatemala blazing with stars! What in heaven's name was to be done? The emotion caused by what for a moment seemed almost a diplomatic incident was diverted by the appearance of two Chinese servants in long silk robes and four-sided hats, with cocktails and *zakouski*. Then a Russian Princess sailed in. She had white hair and a black silk dress up to her neck. She looked like the heroine of a play by Victorien Sardou who had outlived the melodramatic fury of her youth and now did *crochet*. She was infinitely bored when you spoke to her of Tolstoi or Chekov; but grew animated when she talked of Jack London. She put a question to the maiden lady which the maiden lady, though no longer young, had no answer for.

"Why," she asked, "do you English write such silly books about Russia?"

But then the First Secretary of the British Legation appeared. He gave his entrance the significance of an event. He was very tall, baldish but elegant, and he was beautifully dressed: he looked with polite astonishment at the dazzling Orders of the Minister of Guatemala. The *Chargé d'Affaires* of Montenegro, who flattered himself that he was the best-dressed man in the diplomatic body, but was not quite sure whether the First Secretary of the British Legation thought him so, fluttered up to him to ask his candid

opinion of the frilled shirt he wore. The Englishman placed a gold-rimmed glass in his eye and looked at it for a moment gravely; then he paid the other a devastating compliment. Everyone had come by now but the wife of the French Military Attaché. They said she was always late.

"*Elle est insupportable*," said the handsome wife of the Swiss banker.

But at last, magnificently indifferent to the fact that she had kept everyone waiting for half an hour, she swam into the room. She was tall on her outrageously high heels, extremely thin, and she wore a dress that gave you the impression that she had nothing on at all. Her hair was bobbed and blonde, and she was boldly painted. She looked like a post-impressionist's idea of patient Griselda. When she moved the air was heavy with exotic odours. She gave the Minister of Guatemala a jewelled, emaciated hand to kiss; with a few smiling words made the banker's wife feel *passée*, provincial, and portly; flung an improper jest at the English lady, whose embarrassment was mitigated by the knowledge that the wife of the French Military Attaché was *très bien née*; and drank three cocktails in rapid succession.

Dinner was served. The conversation varied from a resonant, rolling French to a somewhat halting English. They talked of this Minister who had just written from Bucharest or Lima, and that Counsellor's wife who found it so dull in Christiania or so expensive in Washington. On the whole it made little difference to them in what capital they found themselves, for they did precisely the same things in Constantinople, Berne, Stockholm, and Peking. Entrenched within their diplomatic privileges and supported by a lively sense of their social consequence, they dwelt in a world in which Copernicus had never existed, for to them sun and stars circled obsequiously round this earth of ours, and they were its centre. No one knew why the English lady was there and the wife of the Swiss director said privately that she was without doubt a German spy. But she was an authority on the country. She told you that the Chinese had such perfect manners, and you really should have known the Empress Dowager—she was a perfect darling. You knew very well that in Constantinople she would have assured you that the Turks were such perfect gentlemen and the Sultana Fatima was a perfect dear and spoke such wonderful French. Homeless, she was at home wherever her country had a diplomatic representative.

The First Secretary of the British Legation thought the party rather mixed. He spoke French more like a Frenchman than any Frenchman who ever lived. He was a man of taste, and he had a natural aptitude for being right. He only knew the right people and only read the right books; he admired none but the right music and cared for none but the right pictures; he bought his clothes at the right tailor's and his shirts from the only possible haberdasher. You listened to him with stupefaction. Presently you wished with all your heart that he would confess to a liking for something just a little vulgar: you would have felt more at your ease if only with bold idiosyncrasy he had claimed that *The Soul's Awakening* was a work of art or *The Rosary* a masterpiece. But his taste was faultless. He was perfect and you were half-afraid that he knew it, for in repose his face had the look of one who bears an intolerable burden. And then you discovered that he wrote *vers libre*. You breathed again.

2. At a Treaty Port

There was about the party a splendour which has vanished from the dinner tables of England. The mahogany groaned with silver. In the middle of the snowy damask cloth was a centrepiece of yellow silk such as you were unwillingly constrained to buy in the bazaars of your prim youth and on this was a massive épergne. Tall silver vases in which were large chrysanthemums made it possible to catch only glimpses of the persons opposite you, and tall silver candlesticks reared their proud heads two by two down the length of the table. Each course was served with its appropriate wine, sherry with the soup and hock with the fish; and there were the two entrées, a white entrée and a brown entrée, which the careful housekeeper of the 'nineties felt were essential to a properly arranged dinner.

Perhaps the conversation was less varied than the courses, for guests and hosts had seen one another nearly every day for an intolerable number of years and each topic that arose was seized upon desperately, only to be exhausted and followed by a formidable silence. They talked of racing and golf and shooting. They would have thought it bad form to touch upon the abstract and there were no politics for them to discuss. China bored them all, they did not want to speak of that; they only knew just so much

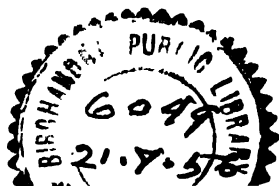
about it as was necessary to their business, and they looked with distrust upon any man who studied the Chinese language. Why should he unless he were a missionary or a Chinese Secretary at the Legation? You could hire an interpreter for twenty-five dollars a month and it was well known that all those fellows who went in for Chinese grew queer in the head. They were all persons of consequence. There was number one at Jardine's with his wife, and the manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank with his wife, the A. P. C. man and his wife, and the B. A. T. man with his wife, and the B. & S. man with his wife. They wore their evening c'lothes a little uneasily as though they wore them from a sense of duty to their country rather than as a comfortable change from day dress. They had come to the party because they had nothing else in the world to do, but when the moment came that they could decently take their leave they would go with a sigh of relief. They were bored to death with one another.

VII

THE ALTAR OF HEAVEN

IT stands open to the sky, three round terraces of white marble placed one above the other, which are reached by four marble staircases, and these face the four points of the compass. It represents the celestial sphere with its cardinal points. A great park surrounds it and this again is surrounded by high walls. And hither, year after year, on the night of the winter solstice, for then heaven is reborn, generation after generation came the Son of Heaven solemnly to worship the original creator of his house. Escorted by princes and the great men of the realm, followed by his troops, the Emperor purified by fasting proceeded to the altar. And here awaited him princes and ministers and mandarins, each in his allotted place, musicians and the dancers of the sacred dance. In the scanty light of the great torches the ceremonial robes were darkly splendid. And before the tablet on which were inscribed the words: Imperial Heaven—Supreme Emperor, he offered incense, jade, and silk, broth and rice spirit. He knelt and knocked his forehead against the marble pavement nine times.

And here at the very spot where the vice-regent of heaven and earth knelt down, Willard B. Untermeyer wrote his name in a fine bold hand and the town and state he came from, Hastings, Nebraska. So he sought to attach his fleeting personality to the recollection of that grandeur of which some dim rumour had reached him. He thought that so men would remember him when he was no more. He aimed in this crude way at immortality. But vain are the hopes of men. For no sooner had he sauntered down the steps than a Chinese caretaker who had been leaning against the balustrade, idly looking at the blue sky, came forward, spat neatly on the spot where Willard B. Untermeyer had written, and with his foot smeared his spittle over the name. In a moment no trace remained that Willard B. Untermeyer had ever visited that place.



VIII

THE SERVANTS OF GOD

THEY were sitting side by side, two missionaries, talking to one another of perfectly trivial things, in the way people talk who wish to show each other civility but have nothing in common; and they would have been surprised to be told that they had certainly one admirable thing in common, goodness, for both had this also in common, humility; though perhaps in the Englishman it was more deliberate, and so, if more conspicuous less natural, than it was in the Frenchman. Otherwise the contrasts between them were almost ludicrous. The Frenchman was hard on eighty, a tall man, still unbent; and his large bones suggested that in youth he had been a man of uncommon strength. Now his only sign of power lay in his eyes, immensely large so that you could not help noticing their strange expression, and flashing. That is an epithet often applied to eyes, but I do not think I have ever seen any to which it might be applied so fitly. There was really a flame in them and they seemed to emit light. They had a wildness which hardly suggested sanity. They were the eyes of a prophet in Israel. His nose was large and aggressive, his chin was firm and square. At no time could he have been a man to trifle with, but in his prime he must have been terrific. Perhaps the passion of his eyes bespoke battles long fought out in the uttermost depths of his heart, and his soul cried out in them, vanquished and bleeding, yet triumphant, and he exulted in the unclosed wound which he offered in willing sacrifice to Almighty God. He felt the cold in his old bones and he wore wrapped about him like a soldier's cloak a great fur and on his head a cap of Chinese sable. He was a magnificent figure. He had been in China for half a century and thrice he had fled for his life when the Chinese had attacked his mission.

"I trust they won't attack it again," he said, smiling, "for I am too old now to make these precipitate journeys." He shrugged his shoulders: "*Je serai martyr.*"

He lit a long black cigar and puffed it with great enjoyment.

The other was very much younger, he could not have been more than fifty, and he had not been in China for more than twenty

years. He was a member of the English Church Mission and he was dressed in a grey tweed suit and a spotted tie. He sought to look as little like a clergyman as possible. He was a little taller than the average, but he was so fat that he looked stumpy. He had a round good-natured face, with red cheeks and a grey moustache of the variety known as tooth-brush. He was very bald, but with a pardonable and touching vanity he had grown his hair long enough on one side to be brought over the scalp and so give himself at all events the illusion that his head was well-covered. He was a jovial fellow, with a hearty laugh, and it rang out loudly, honest and true, when he chaffed his friends or was chaffed by them. He had the humour of a schoolboy and you could imagine him shaking in all his bulk when someone slipped on a piece of orange peel. But the laughter would be stopped, and he would redden, as it struck him suddenly that the man who slipped might have hurt himself, and then he would be all kindness and sympathy. For it was impossible to be with him for ten minutes without realising the tenderness of his heart. You felt that it would be impossible to ask him to do anything he would not gladly do, and if perhaps at first his heartiness would make it difficult to go to him in your spiritual needs you could be sure in all practical affairs of his attention, sympathy, and good sense. He was a man whose purse was always open to the indigent and whose time was always at the service of those who wanted it. And yet perhaps it is unjust to say that in the affairs of the soul his help would not be very effectual, for though he could not speak to you, like the old Frenchman, with the authority of a Church that has never admitted doubt or with the compelling fire of the ascetic, he would share your distress with such a candid sympathy, consoling you with his own hesitations, less a minister of God than a halting, tremulous man of the same flesh as yourself who sought to share with you the hope and the consolation with which his own soul was refreshed, that perhaps in his own way he had something as good to offer as the other.

His story was a little unusual. He had been a soldier and he was pleased to talk of the old days when he had hunted with the Quorn and danced through the London season. He had no unhealthy feeling of past sin.

"I was a great dancer in my young days," he said, "but I expect I should be quite out of it now with all these new dances."

It was a good life so long as it lasted and, though he did not for

a moment regret it, he had no feeling of resentment for it. The call had come when he was in India. He did not exactly know how or why, it had just come, a sudden feeling that he must give up his life to bringing the heathen to the belief in Christ, but it was a feeling that he could not resist; it gave him no peace. He was a happy man now, enjoying his work.

"It's a slow business," he said, "but I see signs of progress and I love the Chinese. I wouldn't change my life here for any in the world."

The two missionaries said good-bye to one another.

"When are you going home?" asked the Englishman.

"Moi? Oh, in a day or two."

"I may not see you again, then. I expect to go home in March."

But one meant the little town with its narrow streets where he had lived for fifty years, since when he left France, a young man, he left it for ever; but the other meant the Elizabethan house in Cheshire, with its smooth lawns and its oak trees, where his ancestors had dwelt for three centuries.

IX

THE INN

IT seems long since the night fell, and for an hour a coolie has walked before your chair carrying a lantern. It throws a thin circle of light in front of you, and as you pass you catch a pale glimpse (like a thing of beauty emerging vaguely from the ceaseless flux of common life) of a bamboo thicket, a flash of water in a rice field, or the heavy darkness of a banyan. Now and then a belated peasant bearing two heavy baskets on his yoke sidles by. The bearers walk more slowly, but after the long day they have lost none of their spirit, and they chatter gaily; they laugh, and one of them breaks into a fragment of tuneless song. But the causeway rises and the lantern throws its light suddenly on a white-washed wall: you have reached the first miserable houses that straggle along the path outside the city wall, and two or three minutes more bring you to a steep flight of steps. The bearers take them at a run. You pass through the city gates. The narrow streets are multitudinous and in the shops they are busy still. The bearers shout raucously. The crowd divides and you pass through a double hedge of serried curious people. Their faces are impassive and their dark eyes stare mysteriously. The bearers, their day's work done, march with a swinging stride. Suddenly they stop, wheel to the right, into a courtyard, and you have reached the inn. Your chair is set down.

The inn—it consists of a long yard, partly covered, with rooms opening on it on each side—is lit by three or four oil lamps. They throw a dim light immediately around them, but make the surrounding darkness more impenetrable. All the front of the yard is crowded with tables and at these people are packed, eating rice or drinking tea. Some of them play games you do not know. At the great stove, where water in a cauldron is perpetually heating and rice in a huge pan being prepared, stand the persons of the inn. They serve out rapidly great bowls of rice and fill the tea-pots which are incessantly brought them. Farther back a couple of naked coolies, sturdy, thick-set and supple, are sluicing themselves with boiling water. You walk to the end of the yard, where,

facing the entrance but protected from the vulgar gaze by a screen, is the principal guest chamber.

It is a spacious, windowless room, with a floor of trodden earth, lofty, for it goes the whole height of the inn, with an open roof. The walls are whitewashed, showing the beams, so that they remind you of a farmhouse in Sussex. The furniture consists of a square table, with a couple of straight-backed wooden arm-chairs, and three or four wooden pallets covered with matting, on the least dirty of which you will presently lay your bed. In a cup of oil a taper gives a tiny point of light. They bring you your lantern and you wait while your dinner is cooked. The bearers are merry now that they have set down their loads. They wash their feet and put on clean sandals and smoke their long pipes.

How precious then is the inordinate length of your book (for you are travelling light and you have limited yourself to three) and how jealously you read every word of every page so that you may delay as long as possible the dreaded moment when you must reach the end! You are mightily thankful then to the authors of long books and when you turn over their pages, reckoning how long you can make them last, you wish they were half as long again. You do not ask then for the perfect lucidity which he who runs may read. A complicated phraseology which makes it needful to read the sentence a second time to get its meaning is not unwelcome; a profusion of metaphor, giving your fancy ample play, a richness of allusion affording you the delight of recognition, are then qualities beyond price. Then if the thought is elaborate without being profound (for you have been on the road since dawn and of the forty miles of the day's journey you have footed it more than half) you have the perfect book for the occasion.

But the noise in the inn suddenly increases to a din and looking out you see that more travellers, a party of Chinese in sedan chairs, have arrived. They take the rooms on each side of you and through the thin walls you hear their loud talking far into the night. With a lazy, restful eye, your whole body conscious of the enjoyment of lying in bed, taking a sensual pleasure in its fatigue, you follow the elaborate pattern of the transom. The dim lamp in the yard shines through the torn paper with which it is covered, and its intricate design is black against the light. At last everything is quiet but for a man in the next room who is coughing painfully. It is the peculiar, repeated cough of phthisis, and hearing it at intervals through the night you wonder how long the

poor devil can live. You rejoice in your own rude strength. Then a cock crows loudly, just behind your head, it seems; and not far away a bugler blows a long blast on his bugle, a melancholy wail; the inn begins to stir again; lights are lit, and the coolies make ready their loads for another day.

X

THE GLORY HOLE

IT is a sort of little cubicle in a corner of the Chandler's store just under the ceiling and you reach it by a stair which is like a ship's companion. It is partitioned off from the shop by matchboarding about four feet high, so that when you sit on the wooden benches that surround the table you can see into the shop with all its stores. Here are coils of rope, oilskins, heavy sea-boots, hurricane lamps, hams, tinned goods, liquor of all sorts, curios to take home to your wife and children, clothes, I know not what. There is everything that a foreign ship can want in an Eastern port. You can watch the Chinese, salesmen and customers, and they have a pleasantly mysterious air as though they were concerned in nefarious business. You can see who comes into the shop and, since it is certainly a friend, bid him join you in the Glory Hole. Through the wide doorway you see the sun beating down on the stone pavement of the roadway and the coolies scurrying past with their heavy loads. At about midday the company begins to assemble, two or three pilots, Captain Thompson and Captain Brown, old men who have sailed the China Seas for thirty years and now have a comfortable billet ashore, the skipper of a tramp from Shanghai, and the taipans of one or two tea firms. The boy stands silently waiting for orders and he brings the drinks and the dice-box. Talk flows rather prosily at first. A boat was wrecked the other day going in to Foochow, that fellow Maclean, the engineer of the *An-Chan*, has made a pot of money in rubber lately, the consul's wife is coming out from home in the *Empress*; but by the time the dice-box has travelled round the table and the loser has signed the chit, the glasses are empty and the dice-box is reached for once more. The boy brings the second round of drinks. Then the tongues of these stolid, stubborn men are loosened a little and they begin to talk of the past. One of the pilots knew the port first hand on fifty years ago. Ah, those were the great days.

"That's when you ought to have seen the Glory Hole," he says, with a smile.

Those were the days of the tea clippers, when there would be

thirty or forty ships in the harbour, waiting for their cargo. Everyone had plenty of money to spend then, and the Glory Hole was the centre of life in the port. If you wanted to find a man, why, you came to the Glory Hole, and if he wasn't there he'd be sure to come along soon. The agents did their business with the skippers there, and the doctor didn't have office hours; he went to the Glory Hole at noon and if anyone was sick he attended to him there and then. Those were the days when men knew how to drink. They would come at midday and drink all through the afternoon, a boy bringing them a bite if they were hungry, and drink all through the night. Fortunes were lost and won in the Glory Hole, for they were gamblers then and a man would risk all the profits of his run in a game of cards. Those were the good old days. But now the trade was gone, the tea clippers no longer thronged the harbour, the port was dead, and the young men, the young men of the A. P. C. or of Jardine's, turned up their noses at the Glory Hole. And as the old pilot talked, that dingy little cubicle with its stained table seemed to be for a moment peopled with those old skippers, hardy, reckless, and adventurous, of a day that has gone for ever.

XI

FEAR

I WAS staying a night with him on the road. The mission stood on a little hill just outside the gates of a populous city. The first thing I noticed about him was the difference of his taste. The missionary's house as a rule is furnished in a style which is almost an outrage to decency. The parlour, with its air of an unused room, is papered with a gaudy paper, and on the wall hang texts, engravings of sentimental pictures—*The Soul's Awakening* and Luke Fildes's *The Doctor*—or, if the missionary has been long in the country, congratulatory scrolls on stiff red paper. There is a Brussels carpet on the floor, rocking-chairs if the household is American and a stiff arm-chair on each side of the fireplace if it is English. There is a sofa which is so placed that nobody sits on it and by the grim look of it few can want to. There are lace curtains on the windows. Here and there are occasional tables on which are photographs and what-nots with modern porcelain on them. The dining-room has an appearance of more use, but almost the whole of it is taken up by a large table and when you sit at it you are crowded into the fireplace. But in Mr. Wingrove's study there were books from floor to ceiling, a table littered with papers, curtains of a rich green stuff, and over the fireplace a Tibetan banner. There was a row of Tibetan Buddhas on the chimney-piece.

"I don't know how it is, but you've got just the feeling of college rooms about the place," I said.

"Do you think so?" he answered. "I was a tutor at Oriel for some time."

He was a man of nearly fifty, I should think, tall and well-covered though not stout, with grey hair cut very short and a reddish face. One imagined that he must be a jovial man fond of laughter, an easy talker and a good fellow; but his eyes disconcerted you: they were grave and unsmiling; they had a look that I could only describe as harassed. I wondered if I had fallen upon him at an inconvenient moment when his mind was taken up with irksome matters, yet somehow I felt that this was not a passing expression, but a settled one rather, and I could not understand it.

He had just that look of anxiety which you see in certain forms of heart disease. He chatted about one thing and another, then he said:

"I hear my wife come in. Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

He led me in and introduced me to a little thin woman, with gold-rimmed spectacles and a shy manner. It was plain that she belonged to a different class from her husband. The missionaries for the most part with all manner of virtues have not those which we can find no better way to describe than under the category of good breeding. They may be saints but they are not often gentlemen. Now it struck me that Mr. Wingrove was a gentleman, for it was evident that his wife was not a lady. She had a vulgar intonation. The drawing-room was furnished in a way I had never before seen in a missionary's house. There was a Chinese carpet on the floor. Chinese pictures, old ones, hung on the yellow walls. Two or three Ming tiles gave a dash of colour. In the middle of the room was a blackwood table, elaborately carved, and on it was a figure in white porcelain. I made a trivial remark.

"I don't much care for all these Chinese things meself," answered my hostess briskly, "but Mr. Wingrove's set on them. I'd clear them all out if I had my way."

I laughed, not because I was amused, and then I caught in Mr. Wingrove's eyes a flash of icy hatred. I was astonished. But it passed in a moment.

"We won't have them if you don't like them, my dear," he said gently. "They can be put away."

"Oh, I don't mind them if they please you."

We began to talk about my journey and in the course of conversation I happened to ask Mr. Wingrove how long it was since he had been in England.

"Seventeen years," he said.

I was surprised.

"But I thought you had one year's furlough every seven?"

"Yes, but I haven't cared to go."

"Mr. Wingrove thinks it's bad for the work to go away for a year like that," explained his wife. "Of course I don't care to go without him."

I wondered how it was that he had ever come to China. The actual details of the call fascinate me, and often enough you find people who are willing to talk of it, though you have to form your own opinion on the matter less from the words they say than

from the implications of them; but I did not feel that Mr. Wingrove was a man who would be induced either directly or indirectly to speak of that intimate experience. He evidently took his work very seriously.

"Are there other foreigners here?" I asked.

"No."

"It must be very lonely," I said.

"I think I prefer it so," he answered, looking at one of the pictures on the wall. "They'd only be business people, and you know"—he smiled—"they haven't much use for missionaries. And they're not so intellectual that it is a great hardship to be deprived of their company."

"And of course we're not really alone, you know," said Mrs. Wingrove. "We have two evangelists and then there are two young ladies who teach. And there are the school children."

Tea was brought in and we gossiped desultorily. Mr. Wingrove seemed to speak with effort, and I had increasingly that feeling in him of perturbed repression. He had pleasing manners and was certainly trying to be cordial and yet I had a sense of effort. I led the conversation to Oxford, mentioning various friends whom he might know, but he gave me no encouragement.

"It's so long since I left home," he said, "and I haven't kept up with anyone. There's a great deal of work in a mission like this and it absorbs one entirely."

I thought he was exaggerating a little, so I remarked:

"Well, by the number of books you have I take it that you get a certain amount of time for reading."

"I very seldom read," he answered with abruptness, in a voice that I knew already was not quite his own.

I was puzzled. There was something odd about the man. At last, as was inevitable, I suppose, we began to talk of the Chinese. Mrs. Wingrove said the same things about them that I had already heard so many missionaries say. They were a lying people, untrustworthy, cruel, and dirty, but a faint light was visible in the East; though the results of missionary endeavour were not very noteworthy as yet, the future was promising. They no longer believed in their old gods and the power of the literati was broken. It is an attitude of mistrust and dislike tempered by optimism. But Mr. Wingrove mitigated his wife's strictures. He dwelt on the good-nature of the Chinese, on their devotion to their parents and on their love for their children.

"Mr. Wingrove won't hear a word against the Chinese," said his wife, "he simply loves them."

"I think they have great qualities," he said. "You can't walk through those crowded streets of theirs without having that impressed on you."

"I don't believe Mr. Wingrove notices the smells," his wife laughed.

At that moment there was a knock at the door and a young woman came in. She had the long skirts and the unbound feet of the native Christian, and on her face a look that was at once cringing and sullen. She said something to Mrs. Wingrove. I happened to catch sight of Mr. Wingrove's face. When he saw her there passed over it an expression of the most intense physical repulsion, it was distorted as though by an odour that nauseated him, and then immediately it vanished and his lips twitched to a pleasant smile; but the effort was too great and he showed only a tortured grimace. I looked at him with amazement. Mrs. Wingrove with an "Excuse me" got up and left the room.

"That is one of our teachers," said Mr. Wingrove in that same set voice which had a little puzzled me before. "She's invaluable. I put infinite reliance on her. She has a very fine character."

Then, I hardly know why, in a flash I saw the truth; I saw the disgust in his soul for all that his will loved. I was filled with the excitement which an explorer may feel when after a hazardous journey he comes upon a country with features new and unexpected. Those tortured eyes explained themselves, the unnatural voice, the measured restraint with which he praised, that air he had of a hunted man. Notwithstanding all he said he hated the Chinese with a hatred beside which his wife's distaste was insignificant. When he walked through the teeming streets of the city it was an agony to him, his missionary life revolted him, his soul was like the raw shoulders of the coolies and the carrying-pole burnt the bleeding wound. He would not go home because he could not bear to see again what he cared for so much, he would not read his books because they reminded him of the life he loved so passionately, and perhaps he had married that vulgar wife in order to cut himself off more resolutely from a world that his every instinct craved for. He martyred his tortured soul with a passionate exasperation.

I tried to see how the call had come. I think that for years he had been completely happy in his easy ways at Oxford; and he had

loved his work, with its pleasant companionship, his books, his holidays in France and Italy. He was a contented man and asked nothing better than to spend the rest of his days in just such a fashion; but I know not what obscure feeling had gradually taken hold of him that his life was too lazy, too contented; I think he was always a religious man and perhaps some early belief, instilled into him in childhood and long forgotten, of a jealous God who hated his creatures to be happy on earth, rankled in the depths of his heart; I think because he was so well satisfied with his life he began to think it was sinful. A restless anxiety seized him. Whatever he thought with his intelligence, his instincts began to tremble with the dread of eternal punishment. I do not know what put the idea of China into his head, but at first he must have thrust it aside with violent repulsion; and perhaps the very violence of his repulsion impressed the idea on him, for he found it haunting him. I think he said that he would not go, but I think he felt that he would have to. God was pursuing him and wherever he hid himself God followed. With his reason he struggled, but with his heart he was caught. He could not help himself. At last he gave in.

I knew I should never see him again and I had not the time to spend on the commonplaces of conversation before a reasonable familiarity would permit me to talk of more intimate matters. I seized the opportunity while we were still alone.

"Tell me," I said, "do you believe God will condemn the Chinese to eternal punishment if they don't accept Christianity?"

I am sure my question was crude and tactless, for the old man in him tightened his lips. But nevertheless he answered.

"The whole teaching of the gospel forces one to that conclusion. There is not a single argument which people have adduced to the contrary which has the force of the plain words of Jesus Christ."

XII

THE PICTURE

I DO not know whether he was a mandarin bound for the capital of the province, or some student travelling to a seat of learning, nor what the reason that delayed him in the most miserable of all the miserable inns in China. Perhaps one or other of his bearers, hidden somewhere to smoke a pipe of opium (for it is cheap in that neighbourhood and you must be prepared for trouble with your coolies), could not be found. Perhaps a storm of torrential rain had held him for an hour an unwilling prisoner.

The room was so low that you could easily touch the rafters with your hand. The mud walls were covered with dirty white-wash, here and there worn away, and all round on wooden pallets were straw beds for the coolies who were the inn's habitual guests. The sun alone enabled you to support the melancholy squalor. It shone through the latticed window, a beam of golden light, and threw on the trodden earth of the floor a pattern of an intricate and splendid richness.

And here to pass an idle moment he had taken his stone tablet and, mixing a little water with the stick of ink which he rubbed on it, seized the fine brush with which he executed the beautiful characters of the Chinese writing (he was surely proud of his exquisite calligraphy and it was a welcome gift which he made his friends when he sent them a scroll on which was written a maxim, glitteringly compact, of the divine Confucius), and with a bold hand he drew on the wall a branch of plum-blossom and a bird perched on it. It was done very lightly, but with an admirable ease; I know not what happy chance guided the artist's touch, for the bird was all a-quiver with life and the plum-blossoms were tremulous on their stalks. The soft airs of spring blew through the sketch into that sordid chamber, and for the beating of a pulse you were in touch with the Eternal.

XIII

HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S REPRESENTATIVE

HE was a man of less than middle height, with stiff brown hair *à la brosse*, a little tooth-brush moustache, and glasses through which his blue eyes, looking at you aggressively, were somewhat distorted. There was a defiant perkiness in his appearance which reminded you of the cock-sparrow, and as he asked you to sit down and inquired your business, meanwhile sorting the papers littered on his desk as though you had disturbed him in the midst of important affairs, you had the feeling that he was on the lookout for an opportunity to put you in your place. He had cultivated the official manner to perfection. You were the public, an unavoidable nuisance, and the only justification for your existence was that you did what you were told without argument or delay. But even officials have their weakness and somehow it chanced that he found it very difficult to bring any business to an end without confiding his grievance to you. It appeared that people, missionaries especially, thought him supercilious and domineering. He assured you that he thought there was a great deal of good in missionaries; it is true that many of them were ignorant and unreasonable, and he didn't like their attitude; in his district most of them were Canadians, and personally he didn't like Canadians; but as for saying that he put on airs of superiority (he fixed his pince-nez more firmly on his nose), it was monstrous! untrue. On the contrary he went out of his way to help them, but it was only natural that he should help them in his way rather than in theirs. It was hard to listen to him without a smile, for in every word he said you felt how exasperating he must be to the unfortunate persons over whom he had control. His manner was deplorable. He had developed the gift of putting up your back to a degree which is very seldom met with. He was in short a vain, irritable, bumptious, and tiresome little man.

During the revolution, while a lot of firing was going on in the city between the rival factions, he had occasion to go to the Southern general on official business connected with the safety of his nationals, and on his way through the yamen he came across three prisoners being led out to execution. He stopped the officer

in charge of the firing-party and, finding out what was about to happen, vehemently protested. These were prisoners of war and it was barbarity to kill them. The officer—very rudely, in the consul's words—told him that he must carry out his orders. The consul fired up. He wasn't going to let a confounded Chinese officer talk to him in that way. An altercation ensued. The general, informed of what was occurring, sent out to ask the consul to come in to him, but the consul refused to move till the prisoners, three wretched coolies green with fear, were handed over to his safe-keeping. The officer waved him aside and ordered his firing-squad to take aim. Then the consul—I can see him fixing his glasses on his nose and his hair bristling fiercely—then the consul stepped forwards between the levelled rifles and the three miserable men, and told the soldiers to shoot and be damned. There was hesitation and confusion. It was plain that the rebels did not want to shoot a British consul. I suppose there was a hurried consultation. The three prisoners were given over to him and in triumph the little man marched back to the consulate.

"Damn it, sir," he said furiously, "I almost thought the blighters would have the confounded cheek to shoot me."

They are strange people, the British. If their manners were as good as their courage is great they would merit the opinion they have of themselves.

XIV

THE OPIUM DEN

ON the stage it makes a very effective set. It is dimly lit. The room is low and squalid. In one corner a lamp burns mysteriously before a hideous image and incense fills the theatre with its exotic scent. A pig-tailed Chinaman wanders to and fro, aloof and saturnine, while on wretched pallets lie stupefied the victims of the drug. Now and then one of them breaks into frantic raving. There is a highly dramatic scene where some poor creature, unable to pay for the satisfaction of his craving, with prayers and curses begs the villainous proprietor for a pipe to still his anguish. I have read also in novels descriptions which made my blood run cold. And when I was taken to an opium den by a smooth-spoken Eurasian, the narrow, winding stairway up which he led me prepared me sufficiently to receive the thrill I expected. I was introduced into a neat enough room, brightly lit, divided into cubicles the raised floor of which, covered with clean matting, formed a convenient couch. In one an elderly gentleman, with a grey head and very beautiful hands, was quietly reading a newspaper, with his long pipe by his side. In another two coolies were lying, with a pipe between them, which they alternately prepared and smoked. They were young men, of a hearty appearance, and they smiled at me in a friendly way. One of them offered me a smoke. In a third four men squatted over a chess-board, and a little farther on a man was dandling a baby (the inscrutable Oriental has a passion for children) while the baby's mother, whom I took to be the landlord's wife, a plump, pleasant-faced woman, watched him with a broad smile on her lips. It was a cheerful spot, comfortable, home-like, and cosy. It reminded me somewhat of the little intimate beer-houses of Berlin where the tired working man could go in the evening and spend a peaceful hour. Fiction is stranger than fact.

THE LAST CHANCE

IT was pathetically obvious that she had come to China to be married, and what made it almost tragic was that not a single man in the treaty port was ignorant of the fact. She was a big woman with an ungainly figure; her hands and feet were large; she had a large nose, indeed all her features were large; but her blue eyes were fine. She was perhaps a little too conscious of them. She was a blonde and she was thirty. In the daytime, when she wore sensible boots, a short skirt, and a slouch hat, she was personable; but in the evening, in blue silk to enhance the colour of her eyes, in a frock cut by heaven knows what suburban dress-maker from the models in an illustrated paper, when she set herself out to be alluring she was an object that made you horribly ill-at-ease. She wished to be all things to all unmarried men. She listened brightly while one of them talked of shooting and she listened gaily when another talked of the freight on tea. She clapped her hands with girlish excitement when they discussed the races which were to be run next week. She was desperately fond of dancing, with a young American, and she made him promise to take her to a baseball match; but dancing wasn't the only thing she cared for (you can have too much of a good thing) and, with the elderly, but single, taipan of an important firm, what she simply loved was a game of golf. She was willing to be taught billiards by a young man who had lost his leg in the war and she gave her sprightly attention to the manager of a bank who told her what he thought of silver. She was not much interested in the Chinese, for that was a subject which was not very good form in the circles in which she found herself, but being a woman she could not help being revolted at the way in which Chinese women were treated.

"You know, they don't have a word to say about who they're going to marry," she explained. "It's all arranged by go-betweens and the man doesn't even see the girl till he's married her. There's no romance or anything like that. And as far as love goes . . ."

Words failed her. She was a thoroughly good-natured creature. She would have made any of those men, young or old, a perfectly good wife. And she knew it.

XVI

THE NUN

THE convent lay white and cool among the trees on the top of a hill; and as I stood at the gateway, waiting to be let in, I looked down at the tawny river glittering in the sunlight and at the rugged mountains beyond. It was the Mother Superior who received me, a placid, sweet-faced lady with a soft voice and an accent which told me that she came from the South of France. She showed me the orphans who were in her charge, busy at the lace-making which the nuns had taught them, smiling shyly; and she showed me the hospital where lay soldiers suffering from dysentery, typhoid, and malaria. They were squalid and dirty. The Mother Superior told me she was a Basque. The mountains that she looked out on from the convent windows reminded her of the Pyrenees. She had been in China for twenty years. She said that it was hard sometimes never to see the sea; here on the great river they were a thousand miles away from it; and because I knew the country where she was born she talked to me a little of the fine roads that led over the mountains—ah, they did not have them here in China—and the vineyards and the pleasant villages with their running streams that nestled at the foot of the hills. But the Chinese were good people. The orphans were very quick with their fingers and they were industrious; the Chinese sought them as wives because they had learnt useful things in the convent, and even after they were married they could earn a little money by their needles. And the soldiers too, they were not so bad as people said; after all, *les pauvres petits*, they did not want to be soldiers; they would much sooner be at home working in the fields. Those whom the sisters had nursed through illness were not devoid of gratitude. Sometimes when they were coming along in a chair and overtook two nuns who had been in the town to buy things and were laden with parcels, they would offer to take their parcels in the chair. *Au fond*, they were not bad-hearted.

"They do not go so far as to get out and let the nuns ride in their stead?" I asked.

“A nun in their eyes is only a woman,” she smiled indulgently. “You must not ask from people more than they are capable of giving.”

How true, and yet how hard to remember!

XVII

HENDERSON

IT was very hard to look at him without a chuckle, for his appearance immediately told you all about him. When you saw him at the club, reading *The London Mercury* or lounging at the bar with a gin and bitters at his elbow (no cocktails for him), his unconventionality attracted your attention; but you recognised him at once, for he was a perfect specimen of his class. His unconventionality was exquisitely conventional. Everything about him was according to standard, from his square-toed, serviceable boots to his rather long, untidy hair. He wore a loose low collar that showed a thick neck, and loose, somewhat shabby but well-cut clothes. He always smoked a short briar pipe. He was very humorous on the subject of cigarettes. He was a biggish fellow, athletic, with fine eyes and a pleasant voice. He talked fluently. His language was often obscene, not because his mind was impure, but because his bent was democratic. As you guessed by the look of him, he drank beer (not in fact but in the spirit) with Mr. Chesterton and walked the Sussex downs with Mr. Hilaire Belloc. He had played football at Oxford, but with Mr. Wells he despised the ancient seat of learning. He looked upon Mr. Bernard Shaw as a little out of date, but he had still great hopes of Mr. Granville Barker. He had had many serious talks with Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, and he was a member of the Fabian Society. The only point where he touched upon the same world as the frivolous was his appreciation of the Russian Ballet. He wrote rugged poems about prostitutes, dogs, lamp-posts, Magdalen College, public-houses, and country vicarages. He held English, French, and Americans in scorn; but on the other hand (he was no misanthropist) he would not listen to a word in dispraise of Tamils, Bengalis, Kaffirs, Germans, or Greeks. At the club they thought him rather a wild fellow.

"A socialist, you know," they said.

But he was junior partner in a well-known and respectable firm, and one of the peculiarities of China is that your position excuses your idiosyncrasies. It may be notorious that you beat your wife, but if you are manager of a well-established bank the world will

be civil to you and ask you to dinner. So when Henderson announced his socialistic opinions they merely laughed. When he first came to Shanghai he refused to use the jinrickshaw. It revolted his sense of personal dignity that a man, a human being no different from himself, should drag him hither and thither. So he walked. He swore it was good exercise and it kept him fit; besides, it gave him a thirst he wouldn't sell for twenty dollars, and he drank his beer with gusto. But Shanghai is very hot and sometimes he was in a hurry, so now and again he was obliged to use the degrading vehicle. It made him feel uncomfortable, but it was certainly convenient. Presently he came to use it frequently, but he always thought of the boy between the shafts as a man and a brother.

He had been three years in Shanghai when I saw him. We had spent the morning in the Chinese city, going from shop to shop, and our rickshaw boys were hot with sweat; every minute or two they wiped their foreheads with ragged handkerchiefs. We were bound now for the club and had nearly reached it, when Henderson remembered that he wanted to get Mr. Bertrand Russell's new book, which had just reached Shanghai. He stopped the boys and told them to go back.

"Don't you think we might leave it till after luncheon?" I said. "Those fellows are sweating like pigs."

"It's good for them," he answered. "You mustn't ever pay attention to the Chinese. You see, we're only here because they fear us. We're the ruling race."

I did not say anything. I did not even smile.

"The Chinese always have had masters and they always will."

A passing car separated us for a moment and when he came once more abreast of me he had put the matter aside.

"You men who live in England don't know what it means to us when new books get out here," he remarked. "I read everything that Bertrand Russell writes. Have you seen the last one?"

"*Roads to Freedom*? Yes. I read it before I left England."

"I've read several reviews. I think he's got hold of some interesting ideas."

I think Henderson was going to enlarge on them, but the rickshaw boy passed the turning he should have taken.

"Round the corner, you bloody fool," cried Henderson, and to emphasise his meaning he gave the man a smart kick on the bottom.

XVIII

DAWN

IT is night still and the courtyard of the inn is rich with deep patches of darkness. Lanterns throw fitful lights on the coolies busily preparing their loads for the journey. They shout and laugh, angrily argue with one another, and vociferously quarrel. I go out into the street and walk along preceded by a boy with a lantern. Here and there behind closed doors cocks are crowing. But in many of the shops the shutters are down already and the indefatigable people are beginning their long day. Here an apprentice is sweeping the floor, and there a man is washing his hands and face. A wick burning in a cup of oil is all his light. I pass a tavern where half a dozen persons are seated at an early meal. The ward gate is closed, but a watchman lets me through a postern and I walk along a wall by a sluggish stream in which are reflected the bright stars. Then I reach the great gate of the city, and this time one half of it is open; I pass out, and there, awaiting me, all ghostly, is the dawn. The day and the long road and the open country lie before me.

Put out the lantern. Behind me the darkness pales to a mist of purple and I know that soon this will kindle to a rosy flush. I can make out the causeway well enough and the water in the padi fields reflects already a wan and shadowy light. It is no longer night, but it is not yet day. This is the moment of most magical beauty, when the hills and the valleys, the trees and the water, have a mystery which is not of earth. For when once the sun has risen, for a time the world is very cheerless, the light is cold and grey like the light in a painter's studio, and there are no shadows to diaper the ground with a coloured pattern. Skirting the brow of a wooded hill I look down on the padi fields. But to call them fields is too grandiose. They are for the most part crescent-shaped patches built on the slope of a hill, one below the other, so that they can be flooded. Firs and bamboos grow in the hollows as though placed there by a skilful gardener with a sense of ordered beauty to imitate formally the abandon of nature. In this moment of enchantment you do not look upon the scene of humble toil, but on the pleasure gardens of an emperor. Here

throwing aside the cares of state, he might come in yellow silk embroidered with dragons, with jewelled bracelets on his wrists, to sport with a concubine so beautiful that men in after ages felt it natural if a dynasty was destroyed for her sake.

And now with the increasing day a mist arises from the padi fields and climbs half-way up the gentle hills. You may see a hundred pictures of the sight before you, for it is one that the old masters of China loved exceedingly. The little hills, wooded to their summit, with a line of fir trees along the crest, a firm silhouette against the sky—the little hills rise behind one another, and the varying level of the mist, forming a pattern, gives the composition a completeness which yet allows the imagination ample scope. The bamboos grow right down to the causeway, their thin leaves shivering in the shadow of a breeze, and they grow with a high-bred grace so that they look like groups of ladies in the Great Ming dynasty resting languidly by the wayside. They have been to some temple, and their silken dresses are richly wrought with flowers and in their hair are precious ornaments of jade. They rest there for a while on their small feet, their golden lilies, gossiping elegantly, for do they not know that the best use of culture is to talk nonsense with distinction?—and in a moment slipping back into their chairs they will be gone. But the road turns and, my God, the bamboos, the Chinese bamboos, transformed by some magic of the mist, look just like the hops of a Kentish field. Do you remember the sweet-smelling hop-fields and the fat green meadows, the railway line that runs along the sea and the long shining beach and the desolate greyness of the English Channel? The seagull flies over the wintry coldness and the melancholy of its cry is almost unbearable.

XIX

THE POINT OF HONOUR

NOTHING hinders friendly relations between different countries so much as the fantastic notions which they cherish about one another's characteristics, and perhaps no nation has suffered so much from the misconception of its neighbours as the French. They have been considered a frivolous race, incapable of profound thought, flippant, immoral, and unreliable. Even the virtues that have been allowed them, their brilliancy, their gaiety, have been allowed them (at least by the English) in a patronising way; for they were not virtues on which the Anglo-Saxon set great store. It was never realised that there is a deep seriousness at the bottom of the French character and that the predominant concern of the average Frenchman is the concern for his personal dignity. It is by no hazard that La Rochefoucauld, a keen judge of human nature in general and of his countrymen in particular, should have made *l'honneur* the pivot of his system. The punctiliousness with which our neighbours regard it has often entertained the Briton, who is accustomed to look upon himself with humour; but it is a living force, as the phrase goes, with the Frenchman, and you cannot hope to understand him unless you bear in mind always the susceptibility of his sense of honour.

These reflections were suggested to me whenever I saw the Vicomte de Steenvoorde driving in his sumptuous car or seated at the head of his own table. He represented certain important French interests in China and was said to have more power at the Quai d'Orsay than the Minister himself. There was never a very cordial feeling between the pair, since the latter not unnaturally resented that one of his nationals should deal in diplomatic matters with the Chinese behind his back. The esteem in which M. de Steenvoorde was held at home was sufficiently proved by the red button that adorned the lapel of his frock coat.

The Vicomte had a fine head, somewhat bald, but not unbecomingly (*une légère calvitie*, as the French novelists put it and thereby rob the cruel fact of half its sting), a nose like the great Duke of Wellington's, bright black eyes under heavy eyelids, and a small mouth hidden by an exceedingly handsome moustache, the

ends of which he twisted a great deal with white, richly jewelled fingers. His air of dignity was heightened by three massive chins. He had a big trunk and an imposing corpulence, so that when he sat at table he sat a little away from it, as though he ate under protest and were just there for a snack; but nature had played a dirty though not uncommon trick on him; for his legs were much too short for his body, so that, though seated he had all the appearance of a tall man, you were taken aback to find when he stood up that he was hardly of average height. It was for this reason that he made his best effect at table or when he was driving through the city in his car. Then his presence was commanding. When he waved to you or with a broad gesture took off his hat, you felt that it was incredibly affable of him to take any notice of human beings. He had all the solid respectability of those statesmen of Louis Philippe, in sober black, with their long hair and clean-shaven faces, who look out at you with portentous solemnity from the canvases of Ingres.

One often hears of people who talk like a book. M. de Steenvoorde talked like a magazine, not of course a magazine devoted to light literature and the distraction of an idle hour, but a magazine of sound learning and influential opinion. M. de Steenvoorde talked like the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It was a treat, though a little fatiguing, to listen to him. He had the fluency of those who have said the same thing over and over again. He never hesitated for a word. He put everything with lucidity, an admirable choice of language, and such an authority that in his lips the obvious had all the sparkle of an epigram. He was by no means without wit. He could be very amusing at the expense of his neighbours. And when, having said something peculiarly malicious, he turned to you with an observation "*Les absents ont toujours tort*", he managed to invest it with the freshness of an original aphorism. He was an ardent Catholic, but, he flattered himself, no reactionary; a man of standing, substance, and principle.

A poor man, but ambitious (fame, the last infirmity of noble mind), he had married for her enormous *dot* the daughter of a sugar-broker, now a painted little lady with hennaed hair, in beautiful clothes; and it must have been a sore trial to him that when he gave her his honoured name he could not also endow her with the sense of personal pride which was so powerful a motive in all his actions. For, like many great men, M. de Steenvoorde was married to a wife who was extreme'y unfaithful to him. But

this misfortune he bore with a courage and a dignity which were absolutely characteristic. His demeanour was so perfect that his infelicity positively raised him in the eyes of his friends. He was to all an object of sympathy. He might be a cuckold, but he remained a person of quality. Whenever, indeed, Mme. de Steenvoorde took a new lover he insisted that her parents should give him a sufficient sum of money to make good the outrage to his name and honour. Common report put it at a quarter of a million francs, but with silver at its present price I believe that a business man would insist on being paid in dollars. M. de Steenvoorde is already a man of means, but before his wife reaches the canonical age he will undoubtedly be a rich one.

XX

THE BEAST OF BURDEN

AT first when you see the coolie on the road, bearing his load, it is as a pleasing object that he strikes the eye. In his blue rags, a blue of all colours from indigo to turquoise and then to the paleness of a milky sky, he fits the landscape. He seems exactly right as he trudges along the narrow causeway between the rice fields or climbs a green hill. His clothing consists of no more than a short coat and a pair of trousers; and if he had a suit which was at the beginning all of a piece, he never thinks when it comes to patching to choose a bit of stuff of the same colour. He takes anything that comes handy. From sun and rain he protects his head with a straw hat shaped like an extinguisher with a preposterously wide, flat brim.

You see a string of coolies come along, one after the other, each with a pole on his shoulders from the ends of which hang two great bales, and they make an agreeable pattern. It is amusing to watch their hurrying reflections in the padi water. You watch their faces as they pass you. They are good-natured faces and frank, you would have said, if it had not been drilled into you that the Oriental is inscrutable; and when you see them lying down with their loads under a banyan tree by a wayside shrine, smoking and chatting gaily, if you have tried to lift the bales they carry for thirty miles or more a day, it seems natural to feel admiration for their endurance and their spirit. But you will be thought somewhat absurd if you mention your admiration to the old residents of China. You will be told with a tolerant shrug of the shoulders that the coolies are animals and for two thousand years from father to son have carried burdens, so it is no wonder if they do it cheerfully. And indeed you can see for yourself that they begin early, for you will encounter little children with a yoke on their shoulders staggering under the weight of vegetable baskets.

The day wears on and it grows warmer. The coolies take off their coats and walk stripped to the waist. Then sometimes in a man resting for an instant, his load on the ground but the pole still on his shoulders so that he has to rest slightly crouched, you see the poor tired heart beating against the ribs: you see it as

plainly as in some cases of heart disease in the out-patients' room of a hospital. It is strangely distressing to watch. Then also you see the coolies' backs. The pressure of the pole for long years, day after day, has made hard red scars, and sometimes even there are open sores, great sores without bandages or dressing, that rub against the wood; but the strangest thing of all is that sometimes, as though nature sought to adapt man for these cruel uses to which he is put, an odd malformation seems to have arisen so that there is a sort of hump, like a camel's, against which the pole rests. But beating heart or angry sore, bitter rain or burning sun notwithstanding, they go on eternally, from dawn till dusk, year in year out, from childhood to the extreme of age. You see old men without an ounce of fat on their bodies, their skin loose on their bones, wizened, their little faces wrinkled and ape-like, with hair thin and grey; and they totter under their burdens to the edge of the grave in which at last they shall have rest. And still the coolies go, not exactly running, but not walking either, sidling quickly, with their eyes on the ground to choose the spot to place their feet, and on their faces a strained, anxious expression. You can make no longer a pattern of them as they wend their way. Their effort oppresses you. You are filled with a useless compassion.

In China it is man that is the beast of burden.

"To be harassed by the wear and tear of life, and to pass rapidly through it without the possibility of arresting one's course—is not this pitiful indeed? To labour without ceasing, and then, without living to enjoy the fruit, worn out, to depart, suddenly, one knows not whither—is not that a just cause for grief?"

So wrote the Chinese mystic.

XXI

DR. MACALISTER

HE was a fine figure of a man, hard upon sixty, I should think, when I knew him, but hale still and active. He was stout, but his great height enabled him to carry his corpulence with dignity. He had a strong, almost a handsome, face, with a hooked nose, bushy white eyebrows, and a firm chin. He was dressed in black, and he wore a low collar and a white bow tie. He had the look of an English divine of a past generation. His voice was resonant and hearty, and he laughed boisterously.

His career was somewhat out of the common. He had come to China thirty years before as a medical missionary, but now, though still on good terms with the mission, he was no longer a member. It had been decided, it appears, to build a school on a certain desirable spot which the doctor had hit upon, and in a crowded Chinese city it is never very easy to find building land, but when the mission after much bargaining had eventually bought this the discovery was made that the owner was not the Chinese with whom the negotiations had been conducted, but the doctor himself. Knowing that the school must be built and seeing that no other piece of land was available he had borrowed money from a Chinese banker and bought it himself. The transaction was not dishonest, but perhaps it was a little unscrupulous and the other members of the mission did not look upon it as the good joke that Dr. Macalister did. They displayed even a certain acrimony, and the result was that Dr. Macalister, though preserving friendly relations with persons with whose aims and interests he was in the fullest sympathy, resigned his position. He was known to be a clever doctor and he soon had a large practice both among the foreigners and the Chinese. He started a hostel in which the traveller, at a price, and a high one, could have board and lodging. His guests complained a little because they were not allowed to drink alcohol, but it was much more comfortable than a Chinese inn, and some allowance had to be made for the doctor's principles. He was a man of resource. He bought a large piece of land on a hill on the other side of the river and put up bungalows which he sold one by one to the missionaries as summer resorts;

and he owned a large store in which he sold everything, from picture postcards and curios to Worcester sauce and knitted jumpers, which a foreigner could possibly want. He made a very good thing out of it. He had a commercial bent.

The tiffin he invited me to was quite an imposing function. He lived above his store in a large apartment overlooking the river. The party consisted of Dr. Macalister and his third wife, a lady of forty-five in gold-rimmed spectacles and black satin, a missionary spending a few days with the doctor on his way into the interior, and two silent young ladies who had just joined the mission and were busily learning Chinese. On the walls of the dining-room hung a number of congratulatory scrolls which had been presented to my host by Chinese friends and converts on his fiftieth birthday. There was a great deal of food, as there always is in China, and Dr. Macalister did full justice to it. The meal began and ended with a long grace, which he said in his deep voice with an impressive unction.

When we returned to the drawing-room Dr. Macalister, standing in front of the grateful fire, for it can be very cold in China, took a little photograph from the chimney-piece and showed it to me.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked.

It was the photograph of a very thin young missionary in a low collar and a white tie, with large melancholy eyes and a look of profound seriousness.

"Nice-looking fellow, eh?" boomed the doctor.

"Very," I answered.

A somewhat priggish young man possibly, but priggishness is a pardonable defect in youth, and here it was certainly counter-balanced by the appealing wistfulness of the expression. It was a fine, a sensitive, and even a beautiful face, and those disconsolate eyes were strangely moving. There was fanaticism there, perhaps, but there was the courage that would not fear martyrdom; there was a charming idealism; and its youth, its ingenuousness, warmed one's heart.

"A most attractive face," I said as I returned the photograph.

Dr. Macalister gave a chuckle.

"That's what I looked like when I first came out to China," he said.

It was a photograph of himself.

"No one recognises it," smiled Mrs. Macalister.

"It was the very image of me," he said.

He spread out the tails of his black coat and planted himself more firmly in front of the fire.

"I often laugh when I think of my first impressions of China," he said. "I came out expecting to undergo hardships and privations. My first shock was the steamer with ten-course dinners and first-class accommodation. There wasn't much hardship in that, but I said to myself: Wait till you get to China. Well, at Shanghai I was met by some friends and I stayed in a fine house and was waited on by fine servants and I ate fine food. Shanghai, I said, the plague spot of the East. It'll be different in the interior. At last I reached here. I was to stay with the head of the mission till my own quarters were ready. He lived in a large compound. He had a very nice house with American furniture in it and I slept in a better bed than I'd ever slept in. He was very fond of his garden and he grew all kinds of vegetables in it. We had salads just like the salads we had in America and fruit, all kinds of fruit; he kept a cow and we had fresh milk and butter. I thought I'd never eaten so much and so well in my life. You did nothing for yourself. If you wanted a glass of water you called a boy and he brought it to you. It was the beginning of summer when I arrived and they were all packing up to go to the hills. They hadn't got bungalows then, but they used to spend the summer in a temple. I began to think I shouldn't have to put up with much privation after all. I had been looking forward to a martyr's crown. Do you know what I did?"

Dr. Macalister chuckled as he thought of that long-past time.

"The first night I got here, when I was alone in my room, I threw myself on my bed and I just cried like a child."

Dr. Macalister went on talking, but I could not pay much attention to what he said. I wondered by what steps he had come to be the man I knew now from the man he had been then. That is the story I should like to write.

XXII

THE ROAD

IT is not a road at all but a causeway, made of paving-stones about a foot wide and four feet broad so that there is just room for two sedan chairs with caution to pass each other. For the most part it is in good enough repair, but here and there the stones are broken or swept away by the flooding of the rice fields, and then walking is difficult. It winds tortuously along the path which has connected city to city since first a thousand years ago or more there were cities in the land. It winds between the rice fields following the accidents of the country with a careful nonchalance; and you can tell that it was built on a track made by the peasant of dim ages past who sought not the quickest but the easiest way to walk. The beginnings of it you may see when, leaving the main road, you cut across-country, bound for some town that is apart from the main line of traffic. Then the causeway is so narrow that there is no room for a coolie bearing a load to pass and if you are in the midst of the rice fields he has to get on the little bank, planted with beans, that divides one from another, till you go by. Presently the stones are wanting and you travel along a path of trodden mud so narrow that your bearers step warily.

The journey, for all the stories of bandits with which they sought to deter you, and the ragged soldiers of your escort, is devoid of adventure; but it is crowded with incident. First there is the constant variety of the dawn. Poets have written of it with enthusiasm, but they are lie-a-beds, and they have trusted for inspiration to their fancy rather than to their sleepy eyes. Like a mistress known in the dream of a moonlit night who has charms unshared by the beauties of the wakeful day, they have ascribed to it excellencies which are only of the imagination. For the most exquisite dawn has none of the splendour of an indifferent sunset. But because it is a less accustomed sight it seems to have a greater diversity. Every dawn is a little different from every other, and you can fancy that each day the world is created anew not quite the same as it was the day before.

Then there are the common sights of the wayside. A peasant, thigh-deep in water, ploughs his field with a plough as primitive

as those his fathers have used for forty mortal centuries. The water buffalo splashes sinister through the mud and his cynical eyes seem to ask what end has been served by this unending toil. An old woman goes by in her blue smock and short blue trousers, on bound feet, and she supports her unsteady steps with a long staff. Two fat Chinese in chairs pass you, and passing stare at you with curious yet listless eyes. Everyone you see is an incident, however trivial, sufficient to arouse your fancy for an instant; and now your eyes rest with pleasure on the smooth skin, like yellow ivory, of a young mother sauntering along with a child strapped to her back, on the wrinkled, inscrutable visage of an old man, or on the fine bones, visible through the flesh of the face, of a strapping coolie. And beside all this there is the constant delight with which, having climbed laboriously a hill, you see the country spread out before you. For days and days it is just the same, but each time you see it you have the same little thrill of discovery. The same little rounded hills, like a flock of sheep, surrounding you, succeeding one another as far as the eye can reach; and on many, a lone tree, as though planted deliberately for the sake of the picturesque, outlines its gracious pattern against the sky. The same groves of bamboo lean delicately, almost surrounding the same farmhouses, which with their clustering roofs nestle pleasantly in the same sheltered hollows. The bamboos lean over the highway with an adorable grace. They have the condescension of great ladies which flatters rather than wounds. They have the abandon of flowers, a well-born wantonness that is too sure of its good breeding ever to be in danger of debauchery. But the memorial arch, to virtuous widow or to fortunate scholar, warns you that you are approaching a village or a town, and you pass, affording a moment's sensation to the inhabitants, through a ragged line of sordid hovels or a busy street. The street is shaded from the sun by great mats stretched from eave to eave; the light is dim and the thronging crowd has an unnatural air. You think that so must have looked the people in those cities of magicians which the Arab traveller knew, and where during the night a terrible transformation befell you so that, till you found the magic formula to free you, you went through life in the guise of a one-eyed ass or of a green and yellow parrot. The merchants in their open shops seem to sell no common merchandise and in the taverns messes are prepared of things horrible for men to eat. Your eye, amid the uniformity, for every Chinese town, at all

events to the stranger's eye, much resembles every other, takes pleasure in noting trivial differences, and so you observe the predominant industries of each one. Every town makes all that its inhabitants require, but it has also a speciality, and here you will find cotton cloth, there string, and here again silk. Now the orange tree, golden with fruit, grows scarce and the sugar cane makes its appearance. The black silk cap gives way to the turban and the red umbrella of oiled paper to the umbrella of bright blue cotton.

But these are the common incidents of every day. They are like the expected happenings of life which keep it from monotony, working days and holidays, meetings with your friends, the coming of spring with its elation and the coming of winter with its long evenings, its easy intimacies and its twilight. Now and then, as love enters making all the rest but a setting for its radiance and lifts the common affairs of the day to a level on which the most trifling things have a mysterious significance—now and then the common round is interrupted and you are faced by a beauty which takes your soul, all unprepared, by assault. For looming through the mist you may see the fantastic roofs of a temple loftily raised on a huge stone bastion, around which, a natural moat, flows a quiet green river, and when the sun lights it you seem to see the dream of a Chinese palace, a palace as rich and splendid as those which haunted the fancy of the Arabian story-tellers; or, crossing a ferry at dawn, you may see, a little above you, silhouetted against the sunrise, a sampan in which a ferryman is carrying a crowd of passengers; you recognise on a sudden Charon, and you know that his passengers are the melancholy dead.

XXIII

GOD'S TRUTH

BIRCH was the agent of the B. A. T. and he was stationed in a little town of the interior with streets which, after it had rained, were a foot deep in mud. Then you had to get right inside your cart to prevent yourself from being splashed from head to foot. The roadway, worn to pieces by the ceaseless traffic, was so full of holes that the breath was jolted out of your body as you jogged along at a foot pace. There were two or three streets of shops, but he knew by heart everything that was in them; and there were interminable winding alleys which presented a monotonous expanse of wall broken only by solid closed doors. These were the Chinese houses and they were as impenetrable to one of his colour as the life which surrounded him. He was very homesick. He had not spoken to a white man for three months.

His day's work was over. Since he had nothing else to do he went for the only walk there was. He went out of the city gate and strolled along the ragged road, with its deep ruts, into the country. The valley was bounded by wild, barren mountains and they seemed to shut him in. He felt immeasurably far away from civilisation. He knew he could not afford to surrender to that sense of utter loneliness which beset him, but it was more of an effort than usual to keep a stiff upper lip. He was very nearly at the end of his tether. Suddenly he saw a white man riding towards him on a pony. Behind came slowly a Chinese cart in which presumably were his belongings. Birch guessed at once that this was a missionary going down to one of the treaty ports from his station farther up-country, and his heart leaped with joy. At last he would have someone to talk to. He hurried his steps. His lassitude left him. He was all alert. He was almost running when he came up to the rider.

"Hulloa," he said, "where have you sprung from?"

The rider stopped and named a distant town.

"I am on my way down to take the train," he added.

"You'd better put up with me for the night. I haven't seen a white man for three months. There's lots of room at my place. B. A. T., you know."

"B. A. T.," said the rider. His face changed and his eyes, before friendly and smiling, grew hard. "I don't want to have anything to do with you."

He gave his pony a kick and started on, but Birch seized the bridle. He could not believe his ears.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't have anything to do with a man who trades in tobacco. Let go that bridle."

"But I've not spoken to a white man for three months."

"That's no business of mine. Let go that bridle."

He gave his pony another kick. His lips were obstinately set and he looked at Birch sternly. Then Birch lost his temper. He clung to the bridle as the pony moved on and began to curse the missionary. He hurled at him every term of abuse he could think of. He swore. He was horribly obscene. The missionary did not answer, but urged his pony on. Birch seized the missionary's leg and jerked it out of the stirrup; the missionary nearly fell off and he clung in a somewhat undignified fashion to the pony's mane. Then he half-slipped, half-tumbled to the ground. The cart had come up to them by now and stopped. The two Chinese who were sitting in it looked at the white men with indolent curiosity. The missionary was livid with rage.

"You've assaulted me. I'll have you fired for that."

"You can go to hell," said Birch. "I haven't seen a white man for three months and you won't even speak to me. Do you call yourself a Christian?"

"What is your name?"

"Birch is my name, and be damned to you."

"I shall report you to your chief. Now stand back and let me get on my journey."

Birch clenched his hands.

"Get a move on or I'll break every bone in your body."

The missionary mounted, gave his pony a sharp cut with the whip, and cantered away. The Chinese cart lumbered slowly after. But when Birch was left alone his anger left him and a sob broke unwillingly from his lips. The barren mountains were less hard than the heart of man. He turned and walked slowly back to the little walled city.

XXIV

ROMANCE

ALL day I had been dropping down the river. This was the river up which Chang Chien, seeking its source, had sailed for many days till he came to a city where he saw a girl spinning and a youth leading an ox to the water. He asked what place this was and in reply the girl gave him her shuttle, telling him to show it on his return to the astrologer Yen Chün-ping, who would thus know where he had been. He did so and the astrologer at once recognised the shuttle as that of the Spinning Damsel, further declaring that on the day and at the hour when Chang Chien received the shuttle he had noticed a wandering star intrude itself between the Spinning Damsel and the Cowherd. So Chang Chien knew that he had sailed upon the bosom of the Milky Way.

I, however, had not been so far. All day, as for seven days before, my five rowers, standing up, had rowed, and there rang still in my ears the monotonous sound of their oars against the wooden pin that served as rowlock. Now and again the water became very shallow and there was a jar and a jolt as we scraped along the stones of the river bed. Then two or three of the rowers turned up their blue trousers to the hip and let themselves over the side. Shouting they dragged the flat-bottomed boat over the shoal. Now and again we came to a rapid, of no great consequence when compared with the turbulent rapids of the Yangtze, but sufficiently swift to call for trackers to pull the junks that were going up-stream; and we, going down, passed through them with many shouts, shot the foaming breakers and presently reached water as smooth as any lake.

Now it was night and my crew were asleep, forward, huddled together in such shelter as they had been able to rig up when we moored at dusk. I sat on my bed. Bamboo matting spread over three wooden arches made the sorry cabin which for a week had served me as parlour and bedroom. It was closed at one end by matchboarding so roughly put together that there were large chinks between each board. The bitter wind blew through them. It was on the other side of this that the crew—fine sturdy fellows—rowed by day and slept by night, joined then by the steersman,

who had stood from dawn to dusk, in a tattered blue gown and a wadded coat of faded grey, a black turban round his head, at the long oar which was his helm. There was no furniture but my bed, a shallow dish like an enormous soup-plate in which burned charcoal, for it was cold, a basket containing my clothes which I used as a table, and a hurricane lamp which hung from one of the arches and swayed slightly with the motion of the water. The cabin was so low that I, a person of no great height (I comfort myself with Bacon's observation that with tall men it is as with tall houses, the top storey is commonly the least furnished), could only just stand upright. One of the sleepers began to snore more loudly, and perhaps he awoke two of the others, for I heard the sound of speaking; but presently this ceased, the snorer was quiet, and all about me once more was silence.

Then suddenly I had a feeling that here, facing me, touching me almost, was the romance I sought. It was a feeling like no other, just as specific as the thrill of art; but I could not for the life of me tell what it was that had given me just then that rare emotion.

In the course of my life I have been often in situations which, had I read of them, would have seemed to me sufficiently romantic; but it is only in retrospect, comparing them with my ideas of what was romantic, that I have seen them as at all out of the ordinary. It is only by an effort of the imagination, making myself as it were a spectator of myself acting a part, that I have caught anything of the precious quality in circumstances which in others would have seemed to me instinct with its fine flower. When I have danced with an actress whose fascination and whose genius made her the idol of my country, or wandered through the halls of some great house in which was gathered all that was distinguished by lineage or intellect that London could show, I have only recognised afterwards that here perhaps, though in somewhat Ouidaesque a fashion, was romance. In battle, when, myself in no great danger, I was able to watch events with a thrill of interest, I had not the phlegm to assume the part of a spectator. I have sailed through the night, under the full moon, to a coral island in the Pacific, and then the beauty and the wonder of the scene gave me a conscious happiness, but only later the exhilarating sense that romance and I had touched fingers. I heard the flutter of its wings when once, in the bedroom of a hotel in New York, I sat round a table with half a dozen others and made plans to restore an ancient kingdom whose wrongs have for a century inspired the poet and the patriot;

but my chief feeling was a surprised amusement that through the hazards of war I found myself engaged in business so foreign to my bent. The authentic thrill of romance has seized me under circumstances which one would have thought far less romantic, and I remember that I knew it first one evening when I was playing cards in a cottage on the coast of Brittany. In the next room an old fisherman lay dying and the women of the house said that he would go out with the tide. Without a storm was raging and it seemed fit for the last moments of that aged warrior of the seas that his going should be accompanied by the wild cries of the wind as it hurled itself against the shuttered windows. The waves thundered upon the tortured rocks. I felt a sudden exultation, for I knew that here was romance.

And now the same exultation seized me, and once more romance, like a bodily presence, was before me. But it had come so unexpectedly that I was intrigued. I could not tell whether it had crept in among the shadows that the lamp threw on the bamboo matting or whether it was wafted down the river that I saw through the opening of my cabin. Curious to know what were the elements that made up the ineffable delight of the moment I went out to the stern of the boat. Alongside were moored half a dozen junks, going up-river, for their masts were erect; and everything was silent in them. Their crews were long since asleep. The night was not dark, for though it was cloudy the moon was full, but the river in that veiled light was ghostly. A vague mist blurred the trees on the further bank. It was an enchanting sight, but there was in it nothing unaccustomed and what I sought was not there. I turned away. But when I returned to my bamboo shelter the magic which had given it so extraordinary a character was gone. Alas, I was like a man who should tear a butterfly to pieces in order to discover in what its beauty lay. And yet, as Moses descending from Mount Sinai wore on his face a brightness from his converse with the God of Israel, my little cabin, my dish of charcoal, my lamp, even my camp bed, had still about them something of the thrill which for a moment was mine. I could not see them any more quite indifferently, because for a moment I had seen them magically.

THE GRAND STYLE

HE was a very old man. It was fifty-seven years since he came to China as a ship's doctor and took the place in one of the Southern ports of a medical officer whose health had obliged him to go home. He could not then have been less than twenty-five, so that now he must have been well over eighty. He was a tall man, very thin, and his skin hung on his bones like a suit of clothes much too large for him: under his chin was a great sack like the wattle of an old turkey-cock; but his blue eyes, large and bright, had kept their colour, and his voice was strong and deep. In these seven and fifty years he had bought and sold three or four practices along the coast and now he was back once more within a few miles of the port in which he had first lived. It was an anchorage at the mouth of the river where the steamers, unable owing to their draught to reach the city, discharged and loaded their cargo. There were only seven white men's houses, a small hospital, and a handful of Chinese, so that it would not have been worth a doctor's while to settle there; but he was vice-consul as well, and the easy life at his great age just suited him. There was enough to do to prevent him from feeling idle, but not enough to tire him. His spirit was still hale.

"I'm thinking of retiring," he said, "it's about time I gave the youngsters a chance."

He amused himself with plans for the future: all his life he had wanted to visit the West Indies and, upon his soul, he meant to now. By George, sir, he couldn't afford to leave it much longer. England? Well, from all he heard England was no place for a gentleman nowadays. He was last there thirty years ago. Besides he wasn't English. He was born in Ireland. Yes, sir, he took his degree at Trinity College, Dublin; but what with the priests on one side and the Sinn Feiners on the other he could not believe there was much left of the Ireland he knew as a boy. A fine country to hunt in, he said, with a gleam in his open blue eyes.

He had better manners than are usually found in the medical profession, which, though blest with many virtues, neglects somewhat the amenities of polite behaviour. I do not know whether it

is commerce with the sick which gives the doctor an unfortunate sense of superiority; the example of his teachers, some of whom have still a bad tradition of rudeness which certain eminent practitioners of the past cultivated as a professional asset; or his early training among the poor patients of a hospital, whom he is apt to look upon as of a lower class than himself; but it is certain that no body of men is on the whole so wanting in civility.

He was very different from the men of my generation; but whether the difference lay in his voice and gesture, in the ease of his manner, or in the elaborateness of his antique courtesy, it was not easy to discover. I think he was more definitely a gentleman than people are nowadays, when a man is a gentleman with deprecation. The word is in bad odour and the qualities it denotes have come in for a deal of ridicule. Persons who by no stretch of the fancy could be so described have made a great stir in the world during the last thirty years and they have used all the resources of their sarcasm to render odious a title which they are perhaps all too conscious of never deserving. Perhaps also the difference in him was due to a difference of education. In his youth he had been taught much useless learning, the classics of Greece and Rome, and they had given a foundation to his character which in the present is somewhat rare. He was young in an age which did not know the weekly press and when the monthly magazine was a staid affair. Reading was more solid. Perhaps men drank more than was good for them, but they read Horace for pleasure and they knew by heart the novels of Sir Walter Scott. He remembered reading *The Newcomes* when it came out. I think the men of that time were, if not more adventurous than the men of ours, more adventurous in the grand manner: now a man will risk his life with a joke from *Comic Cuts* on his lips, then it was with a Latin quotation.

But how can I analyse the subtle quality which distinguished this old man? Read a page of Swift: the words are the same as those we use to-day and there is hardly a sentence in which they are not placed in the simplest order; and yet there is a dignity, a spaciousness, an aroma, which all our modern effort fails to attain: in short there is style. And so with him; there was style, and there is no more to be said.

XXVI

RAIN

YES, but the sun does not shine every day. Sometimes a cold rain beats down on you and a north-east wind chills you to the bone. Your shoes and your coat are wet still from the day before and you have three hours to go before breakfast. You tramp along in the cheerless light of that bitter dawn, with thirty miles before you and nothing to look forward to at the end but the squalid discomfort of a Chinese inn. There you will find bare walls, a clammy floor of trodden earth, and you will dry yourself as best you can over a dish of burning charcoal.

Then you think of your pleasant room in London. The rain driving in squalls against the windows only makes its warmth more grateful. You sit by the fire, your pipe in your mouth, and read *The Times* from cover to cover, not the leading articles of course but the agony column and the advertisements of country houses you will never be able to afford. (On the Chiltern Hills, standing in its own park of one hundred and fifty acres, with spacious garden, orchard, etc., a Georgian house in perfect condition, with original woodwork and chimney-pieces, six reception rooms, fourteen bedrooms and usual offices, modern sanitation, stabling with rooms over and excellent garage. Three miles from first-rate golf course.) I know then that Messrs. Knight, Frank, and Rutley are my favourite authors. The matters that they treat of, like the great commonplaces which are the material of all fine poetry, never stale; and their manner, like that of the best masters, is characteristic but at the same time various. Their style, as is that of Confucius according to the sinologues, is glitteringly compact: succinct but suggestive, it combines an admirable exactness with a breadth of image which gives the imagination an agreeable freedom. Their mastery of words such as rood and perch, of which I suppose I once knew the meaning but which for many years have been a mystery to me, is amazing, and they will use them with ease and assurance. They can play with technical terms with the ingenuity of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and they can invest them with the Celtic glamour of Mr. W. B. Yeats. They have combined their individualities so completely that I defy the most

discerning critic to discover traces of a divided authorship. Literary history is acquainted with the collaboration of two writers, and the names of Beaumont and Fletcher, Erckmann-Chatrian, Besant and Rice spring to the excited fancy; but now that the higher criticism has destroyed that belief in the triple authorship of the Bible which I was taught in my youth, I conjecture that the case of Knight, Frank, and Rutley is unique.

Then Elizabeth, very smart in the white squirrel I brought her from China, comes in to say good-bye to me, for she, poor child, must go out whatever the weather, and I play trains with her while her pram is being got ready. Then of course I should do a little work, but the weather is so bad that I feel lazy, and I take up instead Professor Giles's book on Chuang-Tzu. The rigid Confucianists frown upon him because he is an individualist, and it is to the individualism of the age that they ascribe the lamentable decay of China, but he is very good reading; he has the advantage on a rainy day that he can be read without great application and not seldom you come across a thought that sets your own wandering. But presently ideas, insinuating themselves into your consciousness like the lapping waves of a rising tide, absorb you to the exclusion of those which old Chuang-Tzu suggested, and notwithstanding your desire to idle, you sit down at your table. Only the dilettante uses a desk. Your pen goes easily and you write without effort. It is very good to be alive. Then two amusing people come to luncheon and when they are gone you drop in to Christie's. You see some Ming figures there, but they are not so good as those you brought from China yourself, and then you watch being sold pictures you are only too glad not to possess. You look at your watch; there is pretty sure to be a rubber going at the Garrick, and the shocking weather justifies you in wasting the rest of the afternoon. You cannot stay very late, for you have seats for a first night and you must get home and dress for an early dinner. You will be just in time to tell Elizabeth a little story before she goes to sleep. She looks really very nice in her pyjamas with her hair done up in two plaits. There is something about a first night which only the satiety of the critic can fail to be moved by. It is pleasant to see your friends and amusing to hear the pit's applause when a favourite of the stage, acting, better than she ever does behind the footlights, a delightful embarrassment at being recognised, advances to take her seat. It may be a bad play that you are going to see, but it has at least the merit that no one has

seen it before; and there is always the chance of a moment's emotion or of a smile.

Towards you in their great straw hats, like the hat of love-sick Pierrot, but with a huge brim, come a string of coolies, lolloping along, bent forward a little under the weight of the great bales of cotton that they carry. The rain plasters their blue clothes, so thin and ragged, against their bodies. The broken stones of the causeway are slippery, and with toil you pick your muddy way.

XXVII

SULLIVAN

HE was an Irish sailor. He deserted his ship at Hong Kong and took it into his head to walk across China. He spent three years wandering about the country, and soon acquired a very good knowledge of Chinese. He learned it, as is common among men of his class, with greater ease than do the more highly educated. He lived on his wits. He made a point of avoiding the British consul, but went to the magistrate of each town he came to and represented himself as having been robbed on the way of all his money. His story was not improbable and it was told with a wealth of convincing detail which would have excited the admiration of so great a master as Captain Costigan. The magistrate, after the Chinese fashion, was anxious to get rid of him and was glad to do so at the cost of ten or fifteen dollars. If he could get no money he could generally count on a place to sleep in and a good meal. He had a certain rough humour which appealed to the Chinese. So he continued very successfully till he hit by misfortune on a magistrate of a different stamp. This man when he told his story said to him:

"You are nothing but a beggar and a vagabond. You must be beaten."

He gave an order and the fellow was promptly taken out, thrown on the ground, and soundly thrashed. He was not only very much hurt, but exceedingly surprised, and, what is more, strangely mortified. It ruined his nerve. There and then he gave up his vagrant life and, making his way to one of the out-ports, applied to the commissioner of customs for a place as tide-waiter. It is not easy to find white men to take such posts and few questions are asked of those who seek them. He was given a job and you may see him now, a sun-burned, clean-shaven man of forty-five, florid and rather stout, in a neat blue uniform, boarding the steamers and the junks at a little riverside town, where the deputy commissioner, the postmaster, a missionary, and he are the only Europeans. His knowledge of the Chinese and their ways makes him an invaluable servant. He has a little yellow wife and four children. He has no shame about his past and over a good stiff whisky he will tell you

the whole story of his adventurous travels. But the beating is what he can never get over. It surprises him yet and he cannot, he simply cannot, understand it. He has no ill-feeling towards the magistrate who ordered it; on the contrary it appeals to his sense of humour.

"He was a great old sportsman, the old blackguard," he says. "Nerve, eh?"

XXVIII

THE DINING-ROOM

IT was an immense room in an immense house. When it was built, building was cheap, and the merchant princes of that day built magnificently. Money was made easily then and life was luxurious. It was not hard to make a fortune, and a man almost before he had reached middle age could return to England and live the rest of his days no less splendidly in a fine house in Surrey. It is true that the population was hostile and it was always possible that a riot might make it necessary for him to fly for his life, but this only added a spice to the comfort of his existence; and when danger threatened it was fairly certain that a gunboat would arrive in time to offer protection or refuge. The foreign community, largely allied by marriage, was sociable, and its members entertained one another lavishly. They gave pompous dinner parties, they danced together, and they played whist. Work was not so pressing that it was impossible to spend now and again a few days in the interior, shooting duck. It was certainly very hot in summer, and after a few years a man was apt to take things easily, but the rest of the year was only warm, with blue skies and a balmy air, and life was very pleasant. There was a certain liberty of behaviour and no one was thought the worse of, so long as the matter was not intruded on the notice of the ladies, if he had to live with him a little bright-eyed Chinese girl. When he married he sent her away with a present and if there were children they were provided for at a Eurasian school in Shanghai.

But this agreeable life was a thing of the past. The port lived on its export of tea and the change of taste from Chinese to Ceylon had ruined it. For thirty years the port had lain a-dying. Before that the consul had had two vice-consuls to help him in his work, but now he was able to do it easily by himself. He generally managed to get a game of golf in the afternoon and he was seldom too busy for a rubber of bridge. Nothing remained of the old splendour but the enormous hong, and they were mostly empty. The tea merchants, such as were left of them, turned their hands to all manner of side lines in the effort to make both ends meet. But the effort was listless. Everyone in the port seemed old. It was no place for a young man.

And in the room in which I sat I seemed to read the history of the past and the history of the man I was awaiting. It was Sunday morning and when I arrived, after two days on a coasting steamer, he was in church. I tried to construct a portrait of him from the room. There was something pathetic about it. It had the magnificence of a past generation, but a magnificence run to seed, and its tidiness, I know not why, seemed to emphasise a shame-faced poverty. On the floor was a huge Turkey carpet which in the 'seventies must have cost a great deal of money, but now it was quite threadbare. The immense mahogany table at which so many good dinners had been eaten, with such a luxury of wine, was so highly polished that you could see your face in it. It suggested port, old and tawny, and prosperous, red-faced gentlemen with side whiskers discussing the antics of the mountebank Disraeli. The walls were of that sombre red which was thought suitable for a dining-room when dinner was a respectable function, and they were heavy with pictures. Here were the father and mother of my host, an elderly gentleman with grey whiskers and a bald head and a stern dark old lady with her hair dressed in the fashion of the Empress Eugénie; and there his grandfather in a stock and his grandmother in a mob cap. The mahogany side-board with a mirror at the back was laden with plated salvers, and a tea service, and much else, while in the middle of the dining table stood an immense *épergne*. On the black marble chimney-piece was a black marble clock, flanked by black marble vases, and in the four corners of the room were cabinets filled with all manner of plated articles. Here and there great palms in pots spread their stiff foliage. The chairs were of massive mahogany, stuffed, and covered with faded red leather, and on each side of the fireplace was an arm-chair. The room, large though it was, seemed crowded, but because everything was rather shabby it gave you an impression of melancholy. All those things seemed to have a sad life of their own, but a life subdued, as though the force of circumstances had proved too much for them. They had no longer the strength to struggle against fate, but they clung together with a tremulous eagerness as though they had a vague feeling that only so could they retain their significance, and I felt that it was only a little time before the end came when they would lie haphazard, in an unlovely confusion, with little numbers pasted on them, in the dreary coldness of an auction room.

XXIX

ARABESQUE

THERE in the mist, enormous, majestic, silent, and terrible, stood the Great Wall of China. Solitarily, with the indifference of nature herself, it crept up the mountain side and slipped down to the depth of the valley. Menacingly, the grim watch-towers, stark and foursquare, at due intervals stood at their posts. Ruthlessly, for it was built at the cost of a million lives and each one of those great grey stones has been stained with the bloody tears of the captive and the outcast, it forged its dark way through a sea of rugged mountains. Fearlessly it went on its endless journey, league upon league to the farthestmost regions of Asia, in utter solitude, mysterious like the great empire it guarded. There in the mist, enormous, majestic, silent, and terrible, stood the Great Wall of China.

XXX

THE CONSUL

MR. PETE was in a state of the liveliest exasperation. He had been in the consular service for more than twenty years and he had had to deal with all manner of vexatious people, officials who would not listen to reason, merchants who took the British Government for a debt-collecting agency, missionaries who resented as gross injustice any attempt at fair play; but he never recollected a case which had left him more completely at a loss. He was a mild-mannered man, but for no reason he flew into a passion with his writer and he very nearly sacked the Eurasian clerk because he had wrongly spelt two words in a letter placed before him for his official signature. He was a conscientious man and he could not persuade himself to leave his office before the clock struck four, but the moment it did he jumped up and called for his hat and stick. Because his boy did not bring them at once he abused him roundly. They say that the consuls all grow a little odd; and the merchants who can live for thirty-five years in China without learning enough of the language to ask their way in the street say that it is because they have to study Chinese; and there was no doubt that Mr. Pete was decidedly odd. He was a bachelor and on that account had been sent to a series of posts which by reason of their isolation were thought unsuited to married men. He had lived so much alone that his natural tendency to eccentricity had developed to an extravagant degree, and he had habits which surprised the stranger. He was very absent-minded. He paid no attention to his house, which was always in great disorder, nor to his food; his boys gave him to eat what they liked and, for everything he had, made him pay through the nose. He was untiring in his efforts to suppress the opium traffic, but he was the only person in the city who did not know that his servants kept opium in the consulate itself, and a busy traffic in the drug was openly conducted at the back door of the compound. He was an ardent collector and the house provided for him by the Government was filled with the various things which he had collected one after the other, pewter, brass, carved wood; these were his more legitimate enterprises; but he also collected

stamps, birds' eggs, hotel labels, and postmarks: he boasted that he had a collection of postmarks which was unequalled in the Empire. During his long sojourning in lonely places he had read a great deal, and though he was no sinologue he had a greater knowledge of China, its history, literature, and people, than most of his colleagues; but from his wide reading he had acquired not toleration but vanity. He was a man of a singular appearance. His body was small and frail and when he walked he gave you the idea of a dead leaf dancing before the wind; and then there was something extraordinarily odd in the small Tyrolese hat, with a cock's feather in it, very old and shabby, which he wore perched rakishly on the side of his large head. He was exceedingly bald. You saw that his eyes, blue and pale, were weak behind the spectacles, and a drooping, ragged, dingy moustache did not hide the peevishness of his mouth. And now, turning out of the street in which was the consulate, he made his way on to the city wall, for there only in the multitudinous city was it possible to walk with comfort.

He was a man who took his work hardly, worrying himself to death over every trifle, but as a rule a walk on the wall soothed and rested him. The city stood in the midst of a great plain and often at sundown from the wall you could see in the distance the snow-capped mountains, the mountains of Tibet; but now he walked quickly, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and his fat spaniel frisked about him unobserved. He talked to himself rapidly in a low monotone. The cause of his irritation was a visit that he had that day received from a lady who called herself Mrs. Yü and whom he with a consular passion for precision insisted on calling Miss Lambert. This in itself sufficed to deprive their intercourse of amenity. She was an Englishwoman married to a Chinese. She had arrived two years before with her husband from England, where he had been studying at the University of London; he had made her believe that he was a great personage in his own country and she had imagined herself to be coming to a gorgeous palace and a position of consequence. It was a bitter surprise when she found herself brought to a shabby Chinese house crowded with people; there was not even a foreign bed in it, nor a knife and fork; everything seemed to her very dirty and smelly. It was a shock to find that she had to live with her husband's father and mother and he told her that she must do exactly what his mother bade her; but in her complete ignorance

of Chinese it was not till she had been two or three days in the house that she realised that she was not her husband's only wife. He had been married as a boy before he left his native city to acquire the knowledge of the barbarians. When she bitterly upbraided him for deceiving her he shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing to prevent a Chinese from having two wives if he wanted them and, he added with some disregard to truth, no Chinese woman looked upon it as a hardship. It was upon making this discovery that she paid her first visit to the consul. He had already heard of her arrival—in China everyone knows everything about everyone—and he received her without surprise. Nor had he much sympathy to show her. That a foreign woman should marry a Chinese at all filled him with indignation, but that she should do so without making proper inquiries vexed him like a personal affront. She was not at all the sort of woman whose appearance led you to imagine that she would be guilty of such a folly. She was a solid, thick-set, young person, short, plain, and matter-of-fact. She was cheaply dressed in a tailor-made suit and she wore a *tam-o'-shanter*. She had bad teeth and a muddy skin. Her hands were large and red and ill cared for. You could tell that she was not unused to hard work. She spoke English with a Cockney whine.

"How did you meet Mr. Yü?" asked the consul frigidly.

"Well, you see, it's like this," she answered. "Dad was in a very good position, and when he died mother said: 'Well, it seems a sinful waste to keep all these rooms empty, I'll put a card in the window.'"

The consul interrupted her.

"He had lodgings with you?"

"Well, they weren't exactly lodgings," she said.

"Shall we say apartments, then?" replied the consul, with his thin, slightly vain smile.

That was generally the explanation of these marriages. Then because he thought her a very foolish, vulgar woman he explained bluntly that according to English law she was not married to Yü and that the best thing she could do was to go back to England at once. She began to cry and his heart softened a little to her. He promised to put her in charge of some missionary ladies who would look after her on the long journey, and indeed, if she liked, he would see if meanwhile she could not live in one of the missions. But while he talked Miss Lambert dried her tears.

"What's the good of going back to England?" she said at last. "I 'aven't got nowhere to go to?"

"You can go to your mother."

"She was all against my marrying Mr. Yü. I should never hear the last of it if I was to go back now."

The consul began to argue with her, but the more he argued the more determined she became, and at last he lost his temper.

"If you like to stay here with a man who isn't your husband it's your own look-out, but I wash my hands of all responsibility."

Her retort had often rankled.

"Then you've got no cause to worry," she said, and the look on her face returned to him whenever he thought of her.

That was two years ago and he had seen her once or twice since then. It appeared that she got on very badly both with her mother-in-law and with her husband's other wife, and she had come to the consul with preposterous questions about her rights according to Chinese law. He repeated his offer to get her away, but she remained steadfast in her refusal to go, and their interview always ended in the consul's flying into a passion. He was almost inclined to pity the rascally Yü, who had to keep the peace between three warring women. According to his English wife's account he was not unkind to her. He tried to act fairly by both his wives. Miss Lambert did not improve. The consul knew that ordinarily she wore Chinese clothes, but when she came to see him she put on European dress. She was become extremely blowsy. Her health suffered from the Chinese food she ate and she was beginning to look wretchedly ill. But really he was shocked when she had been shown into his office that day. She wore no hat and her hair was dishevelled. She was in a highly hysterical state.

"They're trying to poison me," she screamed and she put before him a bowl of some foul-smelling food. "It's poisoned," she said. "I've been ill for the last ten days, it's only by a miracle I've escaped."

She gave him a long story, circumstantial and probable enough to convince him: after all nothing was more likely than that the Chinese women should use familiar methods to get rid of an intruder who was hateful to them.

"Do they know you've come here?"

"Of course they do; I told them I was going to show them up."

Now at last was the moment for decisive action. The consul looked at her in his most official manner.

"Well, you must never go back there. I refuse to put up with your nonsense any longer. I insist on your leaving this man who isn't your husband."

But he found himself helpless against the woman's insane obstinacy. He repeated all the arguments he had used so often, but she would not listen, and as usual he lost his temper. It was then, in answer to his final, desperate question, that she had made the remark which had entirely robbed him of his calm.

"But what on earth makes you stay with the man?" he cried.

She hesitated for a moment and a curious look came into her eyes.

"There's something in the way his hair grows on his forehead that I can't help liking," she answered.

The consul had never heard anything so outrageous. It really was the last straw. And now while he strode along, trying to walk off his anger, though he was not a man who often used bad language he really could not restrain himself, and he said fiercely:

"Women are simply bloody."

XXXI

THE STRIPLING

HE walked along the causeway with an easy, confident stride. He was seventeen, tall and slim, with a smooth and yellow skin that had never known a razor. His eyes, but slightly aslant, were large and open and his full red lips were tremulous with a smile. The happy audacity of youth was in his bearing. His little round cap was set jauntily on his head, his black gown was girt about his loins, and his trousers, as a rule gartered at the ankle, were turned up to the knees. He went barefoot but for thin straw sandals, and his feet were small and shapely. He had walked since early morning along the paved causeway that wound its sinuous path up the hills and down into the valleys with their innumerable padi fields, past burial grounds with their serried dead, through busy villages where maybe his eyes rested approvingly for a moment on some pretty girl in her blue smock and her short blue trousers, sitting in an open doorway (but I think his glance claimed admiration rather than gave it); and now he was nearing the end of his journey and the city whither he was bound seeking his fortune. It stood in the midst of a fertile plain, surrounded by a crenellated wall, and when he saw it he stepped forward with resolution. He threw back his head boldly. He was proud of his strength. All his worldly goods were wrapped up in a parcel of blue cotton which he carried over his shoulder.

Now, Dick Whittington, setting out to win fame and fortune, had a cat for his companion, but the Chinese carried with him a round cage with red bars, which he held with a peculiar grace between finger and thumb, and in the cage was a beautiful green parrot.

THE FANNINGS

THEY lived in a fine square house, with a veranda all round it, on the top of a low hill that faced the river, and below them, a little to the right, was another fine square house which was the customs; and to this, for he was deputy commissioner, Fanning went every day. The city was five miles away and on the river bank was nothing but a small village which had sprung up to provide the crews of junks with what gear or food they needed. In the city were a few missionaries, but these they saw seldom and the only foreigners in the village besides themselves were the tide-waiters. One of these had been an able seaman and the other was an Italian; they both had Chinese wives. The Fannings asked them to tiffin on Christmas Day and on the King's Birthday; but otherwise their relations with them were purely official. The steamers stayed but half an hour, so they never saw the captains or the chief engineers, who were the only white men on them, and for five months in the year the water was too low for steamers to pass. Oddly enough it was then they saw most foreigners, for it happened now and again that a traveller, a merchant or consular official perhaps, more often a missionary, going up-stream by junk, tied up for the night, and then the commissioner went down to the river and asked him to dine. They lived very much alone.

Fanning was extremely bald, a short, thick-set man, with a snub nose and a very black moustache. He was a martinet, aggressive, brusque, with a bullying manner; and he never spoke to a Chinese without raising his voice to a tone of rasping command. Though he spoke fluent Chinese, when one of his "boys" did something to displease him he abused him roundly in English. He made a disagreeable impression on you till you discovered that his aggressiveness was merely an armour put on to conceal a painful shyness. It was a triumph of his will over his disposition. His gruffness was an almost absurd attempt to persuade those with whom he came in contact that he was not frightened of them. You felt that no one was more surprised than himself that he was taken seriously. He was like those little grotesque figures that children blow out like balloons and you had an idea that he went in lively

fear of bursting and then everyone would see that he was but a hollow bladder. It was his wife who was constantly alert to persuade him that he was a man of iron and when the explosion was over she would say to him:

"You know, you frighten me when you get in those passions," or "I think I'd better say something to the boy, he's quite shaken by what you said."

Then Fanning would puff himself up and smile indulgently. When a visitor came she would say:

"The Chinese are terrified of my husband, but of course they respect him. They know it's no good trying any of their nonsense with him."

"Well, I ought to know how to treat them," he would answer with beetling brows, "I've been over twenty years in the country."

Mrs. Fanning was a little plain woman, wizened like a crab-apple, with a big nose and bad teeth. She was always very untidy, her hair, going a little grey, was continually on the point of falling down. Now and then, in the midst of conversation, she would abstractedly take out a pin or two, give it a shake, and without troubling to look in the glass insecurely fix its few thin wisps. She had a love of brilliant colour and she wore fantastic clothes which she and the sewing amah ran up together from the fashion papers; but when she dressed she could never find anything that went with anything else and she looked like a woman who had been rescued from shipwreck and clothed in any oddments that could be found. She was a caricature, and you could not help smiling when you looked at her. The only attractive thing she had was a soft and extremely musical voice and she spoke with a little drawl which came from I know not what part of England. The Fannings had two sons, one of nine and one of seven, and they completed the solitary household. They were attractive children, affectionate and demonstrative, and it was pleasant to see how united the family was. They had little jokes together that amused them hugely, and they played pranks with one another as though not one of them was more than ten. Though they had so much of one another's society it really looked as though they could not bear to be out of one another's sight, and each day when Fanning went to his office his boys would hardly let him go and each day when he returned they greeted him with extravagant delight. They had no fear of his gruff bluster.

And presently you discovered that the centre of this concord

was that little, grotesque, ugly woman; it was not chance that kept the family united, nor peculiarly agreeable dispositions, but a passion of love in her. From the moment she got up in the morning till the time she went to bed her thoughts were occupied with the welfare of the three male persons who were in her charge. Her active mind was busy all the time with schemes for their happiness. I do not think a thought of self ever entered her untidy head. She was a miracle of unselfishness. It was really hardly human. She never had a hard word for anyone. She was very hospitable and it was she who caused her husband to go down to the houseboats and invite travellers to come up to dinner. But I do not think she wanted them for her own sake. She was quite happy in her solitude, but she thought her husband enjoyed a talk with strangers.

"I don't want him to get in a rut," she said. "My poor husband, he misses his billiards and his bridge. It's very hard for a man to have no one to talk to but a woman."

Every evening when the children had been put to bed they played piquet. She had no head for cards, poor dear, and she always made mistakes, but when her husband upbraided her, she said:

"You can't expect everyone to be as clever as you are."

And because she so obviously meant what she said he could not find it in his heart to be angry with her. Then, when the commissioner was tired of beating her, they would turn on the gramophone and sitting side by side listen in silence to the latest songs from the musical comedies of London. You may turn up your nose. They lived ten thousand miles away from England and it was their only tie with the home they loved: it made them feel not quite so utterly cut off from civilisation. And presently they would talk of what they would do with the children when they grew up; soon it would be time to send them home to school and perhaps a pang passed through the little woman's gentle heart.

"It'll be hard for you, Bertie, when they go," she said. "But perhaps we shall be moved then to some place where there's a club and then you'll be able to go and play bridge in the evenings."

THE SONG OF THE RIVER

YOU hear it all along the river. You hear it, loud and strong, from the rowers as they urge the junk with its high stern, the mast lashed alongside, down the swift-running stream. You hear it from the trackers, a more breathless chaunt, as they pull desperately against the current, half a dozen of them perhaps if they are taking up a wupan, a couple of hundred if they are hauling a splendid junk, its square sail set, over a rapid. On the junk a man stands amidships beating a drum incessantly to guide their efforts, and they pull with all their strength, like men possessed, bent double; and sometimes in the extremity of their travail they crawl on the ground on all fours, like the beasts of the field. They strain, strain fiercely, against the pitiless might of the stream. The leader goes up and down the line and when he sees one who is not putting all his will into the task he brings down his split bamboo on the naked back. Each one must do his utmost or the labour of all is vain. And still they sing a vehement, eager chaunt, the chaunt of the turbulent waters. I do not know how words can describe what there is in it of effort. It serves to express the straining heart, the breaking muscles, and at the same time the indomitable spirit of man which overcomes the pitiless force of nature. Though the rope may part and the great junk swing back, in the end the rapid will be passed; and at the close of the weary day there is the hearty meal and perhaps the opium pipe with its dreams of ease. But the most agonising song is the song of the coolies who bring the great bales from the junk up the steep steps to the town wall. Up and down they go, endlessly, and endless as their toil rises their rhythmic cry. "He, aw—ah, oh." They are barefoot and naked to the waist. The sweat pours down their faces and their song is a groan of pain. It is a sigh of despair. It is heart-rending. It is hardly human. It is the cry of souls in infinite distress, only just musical, and that last note is the ultimate sob of humanity. Life is too hard, too cruel, and this is the final despairing protest. That is the song of the river.

HE is a tall man with bulging, sky-blue eyes and an embarrassed manner. He looks as though he were a little too large for his skin and you feel that he would be more comfortable if it were a trifle looser. His hair, very smooth and crisp, fits so tightly on his head that it gives you the impression of a wig, and you have an almost irresistible inclination to pull it. He has no small talk. He hunts for topics of conversation and, racking his brain to no purpose, in desperation offers you a whisky and soda.

He is in charge of the B. A. T., and the building in which he lives is office, godown, and residence all in one. His parlour is furnished with a suite of dingy upholstered furniture placed neatly round the walls, and in the middle is a round table. A hanging petroleum lamp gives a melancholy light, and an oil stove heat. In appropriate places are richly-framed oleographs from the Christmas numbers of American magazines. But he does not sit in this room. He spends his leisure in his bedroom. In America he has always lived in a boarding house where his bedroom was the only privacy he knew, and he has gotten the habit of living in one. It seems unnatural to him to sit in a sitting-room, he does not like to take his coat off, and he only feels at home in shirt-sleeves. He keeps his books and his private papers in his bedroom; he has a desk and a rocking-chair there.

He has lived in China for five years, but he knows no Chinese and takes no interest in the race among whom in all likelihood the best years of his life will be spent. His business is done through an interpreter and his house is managed by a boy. Now and then he takes a journey of several hundred miles into Mongolia, a wild and rugged country, either in Chinese carts or on ponies; and he sleeps at the wayside inns where congregate merchants, drovers, herdsmen, men-at-arms, ruffians, and wild fellows. The people of the land are turbulent; when there is unrest he is exposed to not a little risk. But these are purely business undertakings. They bore him. He is always glad to get back to his familiar bedroom at the B. A. T. For he is a great reader. He reads nothing but American magazines and the number of those he has

sent to him by every mail is amazing. He never throws them away and there are piles of them all over the house. The city in which he lives is the gateway into China from Mongolia. There dwell the teeming Chinese, and through its gates pass constantly the Mongols with their caravans of camels; endless processions of carts, drawn by oxen, which have brought hides from the illimitable distances of Asia rumble noisily through its crowded streets. He is bored. It has never occurred to him that he lives a life in which the possibility of adventure is at his doors. He can only recognise it through the printed page; and it needs a story of derring-do in Texas or Nevada, of hairbreadth escape in the South Seas, to stir his blood.

THE STRANGER

IT was a comfort in that sweltering heat to get out of the city. The missionary stepped out of the launch in which he had dropped leisurely down the river and comfortably settled himself in the chair which was waiting for him at the water's edge. He was carried through the village by the river side and began to ascend the hill. It was an hour's journey along a pathway of broad stone steps, under fir trees, and now and again you caught a delightful glimpse of the broad river shining in the sun amid the exultant green of the padi fields. The bearers went along with a swinging stride. The sweat on their backs shone. It was a sacred mountain with a Buddhist monastery on the top of it, and on the way up there were rest-houses where the coolies set down the chair for a few minutes and a monk in his grey robe gave you a cup of flowered tea. The air was fresh and sweet. The pleasure of that lazy journey—the swing of the chair was very soothing—made a day in the city almost worth while; and at the end of it was his trim little bungalow where he spent the summer, and before him the sweet-scented night. The mail had come in that day and he was bringing on letters and papers. There were four numbers of the *Saturday Evening Post* and four of the *Literary Digest*. He had nothing but pleasant things to look forward to, and the usual peace (a peace, as he often said, which passeth all understanding) which filled him whenever he was among these green trees, away from the teeming city, should long since have descended upon him.

But he was harassed. He had had that day an unfortunate encounter and he was unable, trivial as it was, to put it out of his mind. It was on this account that his face bore a somewhat peevish expression. It was a thin and sensitive face, almost ascetic, with regular features and intelligent eyes. He was very long and thin, with the spindly legs of a grasshopper, and as he sat in his chair swaying a little with the motion of his bearers he reminded you, somewhat grotesquely, of a faded lily. A gentle creature. He could never have hurt a fly.

He had run across Dr. Saunders in one of the streets of the city.

Dr. Saunders was a little grey-haired man, with a high colour and a snub nose which gave him a strangely impudent expression. He had a large sensual mouth and when he laughed, which he did very often, he showed decayed and discoloured teeth; when he laughed his little blue eyes wrinkled in a curious fashion and then he looked the very picture of malice. There was something faunlike in him. His movements were quick and unexpected. He walked with a rapid trip as though he were always in a hurry. He was a doctor who lived in the heart of the city among the Chinese. He was not on the register, but someone had made it his business to find out that he had been duly qualified; he had been struck off, but for what crime, whether social or purely professional, none knew; nor how he had happened to come to the East and eventually settle on the China coast. But it was evident that he was a very clever doctor and the Chinese had great faith in him. He avoided the foreigners and rather disagreeable stories were circulated about him. Everyone knew him to say how do you do to, but no one asked him to his house nor visited him in his own.

When they had met that afternoon Dr. Saunders had exclaimed:

"What on earth has brought you to the city at this time of year?"

"I have some business that I couldn't leave any longer," answered the missionary, "and then I wanted to get the mail."

"There was a stranger here the other day asking for you," said the doctor.

"For me?" cried the other with surprise.

"Well, not for you particularly," explained the doctor. "He wanted to know the way to the American Mission. I told him; but I said he wouldn't find anyone there. He seemed rather surprised at that, so I told him that you all went up to the hills in May and didn't come back till September."

"A foreigner?" asked the missionary, still wondering who the stranger could be.

"Oh yes, certainly." The doctor's eyes twinkled. "Then he asked me about the other missions; I told him the London Mission had a settlement here, but it wasn't the least use going there as all the missionaries were away in the hills. After all it's devilish hot in the city. 'Then I'd like to go to one of the mission schools,' said the stranger. 'Oh, they're all closed,' I said. 'Well then, I'll go to the hospital.' 'That's well worth a visit,' I said, 'the American hospital is equipped with all the latest contrivances.

Their operating theatre is perfect.' 'What is the name of the doctor in charge?' 'Oh, he's up in the hills.' 'But what about the sick?' 'There are no sick between May and September,' I said, 'and if there are they have to put up with the native dispensers.' "

Dr. Saunders paused for a moment. The missionary looked ever so slightly vexed.

"Well?" he said.

"The stranger looked at me irresolutely for a moment or two. 'I wanted to see something of the missions before I left,' he said. 'You might try the Roman Catholics,' I said, 'they're here all the year round.' 'When do they take their holidays, then?'" he asked. 'They don't,' I said. He left me at that. I think he went to the Spanish convent."

The missionary fell into the trap and it irritated him to think how ingenuously he had done so. He ought to have seen what was coming.

"Who was this anyway?" he asked innocently.

"I asked him his name," said the doctor. 'Oh, I'm Christ,' he said. "

The missionary shrugged his shoulders and abruptly told his rickshaw boy to go on.

It had put him thoroughly out of temper. It was so unjust. Of course they went away from May to September. The heat made any useful activity quite out of the question and it had been found by experience that the missionaries preserved their health and strength much better if they spent the hot months in the hills. A sick missionary was only an encumbrance. It was a matter of practical politics and it had been found that the Lord's work was done more efficiently if a certain part of the year was set aside for rest and recreation. And then the reference to the Roman Catholics was grossly unfair. They were unmarried. They had no families to think of. The mortality among them was terrifying. Why, in that very city, of fourteen nuns who had come out to China ten years ago all but three were dead. It was perfectly easy for them, because it was more convenient for their work, to live in the middle of the city and to stay there all the year round. They had no ties. They had no duties to those who were near and dear to them. Oh, it was grossly unjust to drag in the Roman Catholics.

But suddenly an idea flashed through his mind. What rankled most was that he had left the rascally doctor (you only had to look at his face all puckered with malicious amusement to know

he was a rogue) without a word. There certainly was an answer, but he had not had the presence of mind to make it; and now the perfect repartee occurred to him. A glow of satisfaction filled him and he almost fancied that he had made it. It was a crushing rejoinder and he rubbed his very long, thin hands with satisfaction. "My dear sir," he ought to have said, "Our Lord never in the whole course of his ministry claimed to be the Christ." It was an unanswerable snub, and thinking of it the missionary forgot his ill-humour.

DEMOCRACY

IT was a cold night. I had finished my dinner, and my boy was making up my bed while I sat over a brazier of burning charcoal. Most of the coolies had already settled themselves for the night in a room next to mine and through the thin matchboarding of the wall that separated us I heard a couple of them talk. Another party of travellers had arrived about an hour before and the small inn was full. Suddenly there was a commotion, and going to the door of my room to look out I saw three sedan chairs enter the courtyard. They were set down in front of me and from the first stepped out a stout Chinese of imposing aspect. He wore a long black robe of figured silk, lined with squirrel, and on his head a square fur cap. He seemed taken aback when he saw me at the door of the principal guest chamber and turning to the landlord addressed him in authoritative tones. It appeared that he was an official and he was much annoyed to find that the best apartment in the inn was already taken. He was told that but one room was available. It was small, with pallets covered with tumbled straw lining the walls, and was used as a rule only by coolies. He flung into a violent passion and on a sudden arose a scene of the greatest animation. The official, his two companions, and his bearers exclaimed against the indignity which it was sought to thrust upon him, while the landlord and the servants of the inn argued, expostulated, and entreated. The official stormed and threatened. For a few minutes the courtyard, so silent before, rang with the angry shouts; then, subsiding as quickly as it began, the hubbub ceased and the official went into the vacant room. Hot water was brought by a bedraggled servant, and presently the landlord followed with great bowls of steaming rice. All was once more quiet.

An hour later I went into the yard to stretch my legs for five minutes before going to bed and, somewhat to my surprise, I came upon the stout official, a little while ago so pompous and self-important, seated at a table in the front of the inn with the most ragged of my coolies. They were chatting amicably and the official quietly smoked a water-pipe. He had made all that to-do to give

himself face, but, having achieved his object, was satisfied, and feeling the need of conversation had accepted the company of any coolie without a thought of social distinction. His manner was perfectly cordial and there was in it no trace of condescension. The coolie talked with him on an equal footing. It seemed to me that this was true democracy. In the East man is man's equal in a sense you find neither in Europe nor in America. Position and wealth put a man in a relation of superiority to another that is purely adventitious, and they are no bar to sociability.

When I lay in my bed I asked myself why in the despotic East there should be between men an equality so much greater than in the free and democratic West, and was forced to the conclusion that the explanation must be sought in the cess-pool. For in the West we are divided from our fellows by our sense of smell. The working man is our master, inclined to rule us with an iron hand, but it cannot be denied that he stinks: none can wonder at it, for a bath in the dawn when you have to hurry to your work before the factory bell rings is no pleasant thing, nor does heavy labour tend to sweetness; and you do not change your linen more than you can help when the week's washing must be done by a sharp-tongued wife. I do not blame the working man because he stinks, but stink he does. It makes social intercourse difficult to persons of a sensitive nostril. The matutinal tub divides the classes more effectually than birth, wealth, or education. It is very significant that those novelists who have risen from the ranks of labour are apt to make it a symbol of class prejudice, and one of the most distinguished writers of our day always marks the rascals of his entertaining stories by the fact that they take a bath every morning. Now, the Chinese live all their lives in the proximity of very nasty smells. They do not notice them. Their nostrils are blunted to the odours that assail the Europeans and so they can move on an equal footing with the tiller of the soil, the coolie, and the artisan. I venture to think that the cess-pool is more necessary to democracy than parliamentary institutions. The invention of the "sanitary convenience" has destroyed the sense of equality in men. It is responsible for class hatred much more than the monopoly of capital in the hands of the few.

It is a tragic thought that the first man who pulled the plug of a water-closet with that negligent gesture rang the knell of democracy.

XXXVII

THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

HE was a big man, and his bones were well covered. He gave you the impression that he had put on flesh since he bought his clothes, for they seemed somewhat tight for him. He always wore the same things, a blue suit, evidently bought ready-made in a department store (the lapel decorated with a small American flag), a high starched collar and a white tie on which was a pattern of forget-me-nots. His short nose and pugnacious chin gave his clean-shaven face a determined look; his eyes, behind large, gold-rimmed spectacles, were large and blue; and his hair receding on the temples, lank and dull, was plastered down on his head. But on the crown protruded a rebellious cock's feather.

He was travelling up the Yangtze for the first time, but he took no interest in his surroundings. He had no eye for the waste of turbulent waters that was spread before him, nor for the colours, tragic or tender, which sunrise and sunset lent the scene. The great junks with their square white sails proceeded stately down the stream. The moon rose, flooding the noble river with silver and giving a strange magic to the temples on the bank, among a grove of trees. He was frankly bored. During a certain part of the day he studied Chinese, but for the rest of the time he read nothing but a *New York Times* three months old and the parliamentary debates of July 1915, which, heaven knows why, happened to be on board. He took no interest in the religions which flourished in the land he had come to evangelise. He classed them all contemptuously as devil worship. I do not think he had ever read the *Analects of Confucius*. He was ignorant of the history, art, and literature of China.

I could not make out what had brought him to the country. He spoke of his work as a profession which he had entered as a man might enter the civil service, and which, though it was poorly paid (he complained that he earned less than an artisan), he wanted notwithstanding to make a good job of. He wanted to increase his church membership, he wanted to make his school self-supporting. If ever he had had a serious call to convert the heathen there was

in him no trace of it now. He looked upon the whole matter as a business proposition. The secret of success lay in the precious word organisation. He was upright, honest, and virtuous, but there was neither passion in him nor enthusiasm. He seemed to be under the impression that the Chinese were very simple people, and because they did not know the same things that he did he thought them ignorant. He could not help showing that he looked upon himself as superior to them. The laws they made were not applicable to the white man and he resented the fact that they expected him to conform to their customs. But he was not a bad fellow; indeed he was a good-humoured one and so long as you did not attempt to question his authority there is no doubt that he would have done everything in his power to serve you.

XXXVIII

THE PHILOSOPHER

IT was surprising to find so vast a city in a spot that seemed to me so remote. From its battlemented gate towards sunset you could see the snowy mountains of Tibet. It was so populous that you could walk at ease only on the walls and it took a rapid walker three hours to complete their circuit. There was no railway within a thousand miles and the river on which it stood was so shallow that only junks of light burden could safely navigate it. Five days in a sampan were needed to reach the Upper Yangtze. For an uneasy moment you asked yourself whether trains and steamships were as necessary to the conduct of life as we who use them every day consider; for here a million persons thrive, married, begat their kind, and died; here a million persons were busily occupied with commerce, art, and thought.

And here lived a philosopher of repute the desire to see whom had been to me one of the incentives of a somewhat arduous journey. He was the greatest authority in China on the Confucian learning. He was said to speak English and German with facility. He had been for many years secretary to one of the Empress Dowager's greatest viceroys, but he lived now in retirement. On certain days in the week, however, all through the year he opened his doors to such as sought after knowledge, and discoursed on the teaching of Confucius. He had a body of disciples, but it was small, since the students for the most part preferred to his modest dwelling and his severe exhortations the sumptuous buildings of the foreign university and the useful science of the barbarians: with him this was mentioned only to be scornfully dismissed. From all I heard of him I concluded that he was a man of character.

When I announced my wish to meet this distinguished person my host immediately offered to arrange a meeting; but the days passed and nothing happened. I made inquiries and my host shrugged his shoulders.

"I sent him a chit and told him to come along," he said. "I don't know why he hasn't turned up. He's a cross-grained old fellow."

I did not think it was proper to approach a philosopher in so

cavalier a fashion and I was hardly surprised that he had ignored a summons such as this. I caused a letter to be sent asking in the politest terms I could devise whether he would allow me to call upon him and within two hours received an answer making an appointment for the following morning at ten o'clock.

I was carried in a chair. The way seemed interminable. I went through crowded streets and through streets deserted till I came at last to one, silent and empty, in which at a small door in a long white wall my bearers set down my chair. One of them knocked, and after a considerable time a judas was opened; dark eyes looked through; there was a brief colloquy; and finally I was admitted. A youth, pallid of face, wizened, and poorly dressed, motioned me to follow him. I did not know if he was a servant or a pupil of the great man. I passed through a shabby yard and was led into a long, low room sparsely furnished with an American roll-top desk, a couple of blackwood chairs and two little Chinese tables. Against the walls were shelves on which were a great number of books: most of them, of course, were Chinese, but there were many, philosophical and scientific works, in English, French, and German; and there were hundreds of unbound copies of learned reviews. Where books did not take up the wall space hung scrolls on which in various calligraphies were written, I suppose, Confucian quotations. There was no carpet on the floor. It was a cold, bare, and comfortless chamber. Its sombreness was relieved only by a yellow chrysanthemum which stood by itself on the desk in a long vase.

I waited for some time and the youth who had shown me in brought a pot of tea, two cups, and a tin of Virginian cigarettes. As he went out the philosopher entered. I hastened to express my sense of the honour he did me in allowing me to visit him. He waved me to a chair and poured out the tea.

"I am flattered that you wished to see me," he returned. "Your countrymen deal only with coolies and with compradores; they think every Chinese must be one or the other."

I ventured to protest. But I had not caught his point. He leaned back in his chair and looked at me with an expression of mockery.

"They think they have but to beckon and we must come."

I saw then that my friend's unfortunate communication still rankled. I did not quite know how to reply. I murmured something complimentary.

He was an old man, tall, with a thin grey queue, and bright, large eyes under which were heavy bags. His teeth were broken and discoloured. He was exceedingly thin, and his hands, fine and small, were withered and claw-like. I had been told that he was an opium-smoker. He was very shabbily dressed in a black gown, a little black cap, both much the worse for wear, and dark-grey trousers gartered at the ankle. He was watching. He did not quite know what attitude to take up, and he had the manner of a man who was on his guard. Of course the philosopher occupies a royal place among those who concern themselves with the things of the spirit and we have the authority of Benjamin Disraeli that royalty must be treated with abundant flattery. I seized my trowel. Presently I was conscious of a certain relaxation in his demeanour. He was like a man who was all set and rigid to have his photograph taken, but hearing the shutter click lets himself go and eases into his natural self. He showed me his books.

"I took the Ph. D. in Berlin, you know," he said. "And afterwards I studied for some time in Oxford. But the English, if you will allow me to say so, have no great aptitude for philosophy."

Though he put the remark apologetically it was evident that he was not displeased to say a slightly disagreeable thing.

"We have had philosophers who have not been without influence in the world of thought," I suggested.

"Hume and Berkeley? The philosophers who taught at Oxford when I was there were anxious not to offend their theological colleagues. They would not follow their thought to its logical consequences in case they should jeopardise their position in university society.

"Have you studied the modern developments of philosophy in America?" I asked.

"Are you speaking of Pragmatism? It is the last refuge of those who want to believe the incredible. I have more use for American petroleum than for American philosophy."

His judgments were tart. We sat down once more and drank another cup of tea. He began to talk with fluency. He spoke a somewhat formal but an idiomatic English. Now and then he helped himself out with a German phrase. So far as it was possible for a man of that stubborn character to be influenced he had been influenced by Germany. The method and the industry of the Germans had deeply impressed him and their philosophical

acumen was patent to him when a laborious professor published in a learned magazine an essay on one of his own writings.

"I have written twenty books," he said. "And that is the only notice that has ever been taken of me in a European publication."

But his study of Western philosophy had only served in the end to satisfy him that wisdom after all was to be found within the limits of the Confucian canon. He accepted its philosophy with conviction. It answered the needs of his spirit with a completeness which made all foreign learning seem vain. I was interested in this because it bore out an opinion of mine that philosophy is an affair of character rather than of logic: the philosopher believes not according to evidence, but according to his own temperament; and his thinking merely serves to make reasonable what his instinct regards as true. If Confucianism gained so firm a hold on the Chinese it is because it explained and expressed them as no other system of thought could do.

My host lit a cigarette. His voice at first had been thin and tired, but as he grew interested in what he said it gained volume. He talked vehemently. There was in him none of the repose of the sage. He was a polemist and a fighter. He loathed the modern cry for individualism. For him society was the unit, and the family the foundation of society. He upheld the old China and the old school, monarchy, and the rigid canon of Confucius. He grew violent and bitter as he spoke of the students, fresh from foreign universities, who with sacrilegious hands tore down the oldest civilisation in the world.

"But you, do you know what you are doing?" he exclaimed. "What is the reason for which you deem yourselves our betters? Have you excelled us in arts or letters? Have our thinkers been less profound than yours? Has our civilisation been less elaborate, less complicated, less refined than yours? Why, when you lived in caves and clothed yourselves with skins we were a cultured people. Do you know that we tried an experiment which is unique in the history of the world? We sought to rule this great country not by force, but by wisdom. And for centuries we succeeded. Then why does the white man despise the yellow? Shall I tell you? Because he has invented the machine-gun. That is your superiority. We are a defenceless horde and you can blow us into eternity. You have shattered the dream of our philosophers that the world could be governed by the power of law and order. And now you are teaching our young men your secret. You have thrust your

hideous inventions upon us. Do you not know that we have a genius for mechanics? Do you not know that there are in this country four hundred millions of the most practical and industrious people in the world? Do you think it will take us long to learn? And what will become of your superiority when the yellow man can make as good guns as the white and fire them as straight? You have appealed to the machine-gun and by the machine-gun shall you be judged."

But at that moment we were interrupted. A little girl came softly in and nestled close up to the old gentleman. She stared at me with curious eyes. He told me that she was his youngest child. He put his arms round her and with a murmur of caressing words kissed her fondly. She wore a black coat and trousers that barely reaches her ankles, and she had a long pig-tail hanging down her back. She was born on the day the revolution was brought to a successful issue by the abdication of the Emperor.

"I thought she heralded the Spring of a new era," he said. "She was but the last flower of this great nation's Fall."

From a drawer in his roll-top desk he took a few cash and, handing them to her, sent her away.

"You see that I wear a queue," he said, taking it in his hands. "It is a symbol. I am the last representative of the old China."

He talked to me, more gently now, of how philosophers in long past days wandered from State to State with their disciples, teaching all who were worthy to learn. Kings called them to their councils and made them rulers of cities. His erudition was great and his eloquent phrases gave a multi-coloured vitality to the incidents he related to me of the history of his country. I could not help thinking him a somewhat pathetic figure. He felt in himself the capacity to administer the state, but there was no king to entrust him with office; he had vast stores of learning which he was eager to impart to the great band of students that his soul hankered after, and there came to listen but a few, wretched, half-starved, and obtuse provincials.

Once or twice discretion had made me suggest that I should take my leave, but he had been unwilling to let me go. Now at last I was obliged to. I rose. He held my hand.

"I should like to give you something as a recollection of your visit to the last philosopher in China, but I am a poor man and I do not know what I can give you that would be worthy of your acceptance."

I protested that the recollection of my visit was in itself a priceless gift. He smiled.

"Men have short memories in these degenerate days and I should like to give you something more substantial. I would give you one of my books, but you cannot read Chinese."

He looked at me with an amicable perplexity. I had an inspiration.

"Give me a sample of your calligraphy," I said.

"Would you like that?" He smiled. "In my youth I was considered to wield the brush in a manner that was not entirely despicable."

He sat down at his desk, took a fair sheet of paper, and placed it before him. He poured a few drops of water on a stone, rubbed the ink stick in it, and took his brush. With a free movement of the arm he began to write. And as I watched him I remembered with not a little amusement something else which had been told me of him. It appeared that the old gentleman, whenever he could scrape a little money together, spent it wantonly in the streets inhabited by ladies to describe whom a euphemism is generally used. His eldest son, a person of standing in the city, was vexed and humiliated by the scandal of this behaviour; and only his strong sense of filial duty prevented him from reproaching the libertine with severity. I dare say that to a son such looseness would be disconcerting, but the student of human nature could look upon it with equanimity. Philosophers are apt to elaborate their theories in the study, forming conclusions upon life which they know only at second hand, and it has seemed to me often that their works would have a more definite significance if they had exposed themselves to the vicissitudes which befall the common run of men. I was prepared to regard the old gentleman's dalliance in hidden places with leniency. Perhaps he sought but to elucidate the most inscrutable of human illusions.

He finished. To dry the ink he scattered a little ash on the paper and rising handed it to me.

"What have you written?" I asked.

I thought there was a slightly malicious gleam in his eyes.

"I have ventured to offer you two little poems of my own."

"I did not know you were a poet."

"When China was still an uncivilised country," he retorted with sarcasm, "all educated men could write verse at least with elegance."

I took the paper and looked at the Chinese characters. They made an agreeable pattern upon it.

"Won't you also give me a translation?"

"*Traduttore—tradittore*," he answered. "You cannot expect me to betray myself. Ask one of your English friends. Those who know most about China know nothing, but you will at least find one who is competent to give you a rendering of a few rough and simple lines."

I bade him farewell, and with great politeness he showed me to my chair. When I had the opportunity I gave the poems to a sinologue of my acquaintance, and here is the version he made.¹ I confess that, doubtless unreasonably, I was somewhat taken aback when I read it.

*You loved me not: your voice was sweet;
Your eyes were full of laughter; your hands were tender.
And then you loved me: your voice was bitter;
Your eyes were full of tears; your hands were cruel.
Sad, saā that love should make you
Unlovable.*

*I craved the years would quickly pass
That you might lose
The brightness of your eyes, the peach-blossom of your skin,
And all the cruel splendour of your youth.
Then I alone would love you
And you at last would care.*

*The envious years have passed full soon
And you have lost
The brightness of your eyes, the peach-bloom of your skin,
And all the charming splendour of your youth.
Alas, I do not love you
And I care not if you care.*

XXXIX

THE MISSIONARY LADY

SHE was certainly fifty, but a life of convictions harassed by never a doubt had left her face unwrinkled. The hesitations of thought had never lined the smoothness of her brow. Her features were bold and regular, somewhat masculine, and her determined chin bore out the impression given you by her eyes. They were blue, confident, and unperturbed. They summed you up through large round spectacles. You felt that here was a woman to whom command came easily. Her charity was above all things competent and you were certain that she ran the obvious goodness of her heart on thoroughly business lines. It was possible to suppose that she was not devoid of human vanity (and this is to be counted to her for grace), since she wore a dress of violet silk, heavily embroidered, and a toque of immense pansies which on a less respectable head would have been almost saucy. But my Uncle Henry, for twenty-seven years Vicar of Whitstable, who had decided views on the proper manner of dress for a clergyman's wife, never objected to my Aunt Sophie wearing violet, and he would have found nothing to criticise in the missionary lady's gown. She spoke fluently with the even flow of water turned on at a tap. Her conversation had the admirable volubility of a politician at the end of an electioneering campaign. You felt that she knew what she meant (with most of us so rare an accomplishment) and meant what she said.

"I always think," she remarked pleasantly, "that if you know both sides of a question you'll judge differently from what you will if you only know one side. But the fact remains that two and two make four and you can argue all night and you won't make them five. Am I right or am I wrong?"

I hastened to assure her that she was right, though with these new theories of relativity and parallel lines behaving at infinity in such a surprising manner I was in my heart of heart's none too sure.

"No one can eat their cake and have it," she continued, exemplifying Benedetto Croce's theory that grammar has little to do with expression, "and one has to take the rough with the smooth, but

as I always say to the children you can't expect to have everything your own way. No one is perfect in this world and I always think that if you expect the best from people you'll get the best."

I confess that I was staggered, but I determined to do my part. It was only civil.

"Most men live long enough to discover that every cloud has a silver lining," I began earnestly. "With perseverance you can do most things that are not beyond your powers, and, after all, it's better to want what you have than to have what you want."

I thought her eyes were glazed with a sudden perplexity when I made this confident statement, but I dare say it was only my fancy, for she nodded vigorously.

"Of course, I see your point," she said. "We can't do more than we can."

But my blood was up now and I waved aside the interruption. I went on.

"Few people realise the profound truth that there are twenty shillings in every pound and twelve pence in every shilling. I'm sure it's better to see clearly to the end of your nose than indistinctly through a brick wall. If there's one thing we can be certain about it is that the whole is greater than the part."

When, with a hearty shake of the hand, firm and characteristic, she bade me farewell, she said:

"Well, we've had a most interesting chat. It does one good in a place like this, so far away from civilisation, to exchange ideas with one's intellectual equals."

"Especially other people's," I murmured.

"I always think that one should profit by the great thoughts of the past," she retorted. "It shows that the mighty dead have not lived in vain."

Her conversation was devastating.

XL

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

I WAS sitting in the lobby of the hotel, reading a number, several days old, of the *South China Times*, when the door of the bar was somewhat brusquely thrown open and a very long, thin man appeared.

"Do you care for a game of billiards?" he said.

"By all means."

I got up and went with him into the bar. It was a small hotel, of stone, somewhat pretentious in appearance, and it was kept by a half-caste Portuguese who smoked opium. There were not half a dozen people staying there: a Portuguese official and his wife waiting for a ship to take them to a distant colony, a Lancashire engineer who was sullenly drunk all day long, a mysterious lady, no longer young but of voluptuous appearance, who came to the dining-room for meals and went back to her room immediately afterwards; and I had not seen the stranger before. I supposed he had come in that evening on a Chinese boat. He was a man of over fifty, I should think, shrivelled as though the sap had been dried out of him by tropical suns, with a face that was almost brick-red. I could not place him. He might have been a skipper out of a job or the agent of some foreign firm in Hong Kong. He was very silent and he made no answer to the casual remarks that I made in the course of the game. He played billiards well enough, though not excellently, but he was a very pleasant fellow to play with; and when he pocketed my ball, instead of leaving me a double baulk, gave me a reasonable shot. But when the game was over I should never have thought of him again, if suddenly, breaking his silence for the first time, he had not put me a very odd question.

"Do you believe in fate?" he asked.

"At billiards?" I retorted, not a little astonished at his remark.

"No, in life."

I did not want to answer him seriously.

"I hardly know," I said.

He took his shot. He made a little break. At the end of it, chalking his cue, he said:

"I do. I believe if things are coming to you, you can't escape them."

That was all. He said nothing more. When we had finished the game he went up to bed, and I never saw him again. I shall never know what strange emotion impelled him to put that sudden question to a stranger.

XLI

THE SKIPPER

I KNEW he was drunk.

He was a skipper of the new school, a neat little man, clean-shaven, who might easily have passed for the commander of a submarine. In his cabin there hung a beautiful new coat with gold braid on it, the uniform which for its good service in the war has been granted to the mercantile marine, but he was shy of using it; it seemed absurd when he was no more than captain of a small boat on the Yangtze; and he stood on his bridge in a neat brown suit and a homburg hat; you could almost see yourself in his admirably polished shoes. His eyes were clear and bright and his skin was fresh. Though he had been at sea for twenty years and could not have been much less than forty he did not look more than twenty-eight. You might be sure that he was a clean-living fellow, as healthy in mind as he was in body, and the depravity of the East of which they talk had left him untouched. He had a pleasant taste in light literature and the works of E. V. Lucas adorned his bookcase. In his cabin you saw a photograph of a football team in which he figured, and two of a young woman with neatly waved hair whom it was possible enough he was engaged to.

I knew he was drunk, but I did not think he was very drunk, till he asked me suddenly:

"What is democracy?"

I returned an evasive, perhaps a flippant, answer, and for some minutes the conversation turned on less unseasonable topics to the occasion. Then breaking his silence he said:

"I hope you don't think I'm a socialist because I said 'What is democracy.'"

"Not at all," I answered, "but I don't see why you shouldn't be a socialist."

"I give you my word of honour I'm not," he protested. "If I had my way I'd stand them up against a wall and shoot them."

"What is socialism?" I asked.

"Oh, you know what I mean, Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald and all that sort of thing," he answered. "I'm about fed up with the working man."

"But you're a working man yourself, I should have thought."

He was silent for quite a long time and I thought his mind had wandered to other things. But I was wrong; he was thinking my statement over in all its bearings, for at last he said:

"Look here, I'm not a working man. Hang it all, I was at Harrow."

XLII

THE SIGHTS OF THE TOWN.

I AM not an industrious sight-seer, and when guides, professional or friendly, urge me to visit a famous monument I have a stubborn inclination to send them about their business. Too many eyes before mine have looked with awe upon Mont Blanc; too many hearts before mine have throbbed with deep emotion in the presence of the Sistine Madonna. Sights like these are like women of too generous sympathies: you feel that so many persons have found solace in their commiseration that you are embarrassed when they bid you, with what practised tact, to whisper in their discreet ears the whole tale of your distress. Supposing you were the last straw that broke the camel's back! No, madam, I will take my sorrows (if I cannot bear them alone, which is better) to someone who is not quite so certain of saying so exactly the right thing to comfort me. When I am in a foreign town I prefer to wander at random, and if maybe I lose the rapture of a Gothic cathedral I may happen upon a little Romanesque chapel or a Renaissance doorway which I shall be able to flatter myself no one else has troubled about.

But of course this was a very extraordinary sight indeed and it would have been absurd to miss it. I came across it by pure chance. I was sauntering along a dusty road outside the city wall and by the side of it I saw a number of memorial arches. They were small and undecorated, standing not across the way but along it, close to one another, and sometimes one in front of the other, as though they had been erected by no impulse of gratitude to the departed or of admiration for the virtuous but in formal compliment, as knighthoods on the King's Birthday are conferred on prominent citizens of provincial towns. Behind this row of arches the land rose sharply, and since in this part of the country the Chinese bury their dead by preference on the side of a hill, it was thickly covered with graves. A trodden path led to a little tower and I followed it. It was a stumpy little tower, ten feet high perhaps, made of rough-hewn blocks of stone; it was cone-shaped and the roof was like a Pierrot's hat. It stood on a hillock, quaint and rather picturesque against the blue sky, amid the graves. At its foot were a number

of rough baskets thrown about in disorder. I walked round and on one side saw an oblong hole, eighteen inches by eight, perhaps, from which hung a stout string. From the hole there came a very strange, a nauseating, odour. Suddenly I understood what the queer little building was. It was a baby tower. The baskets were the baskets in which the babies had been brought; two or three of them were quite new, they could not have been there more than a few hours. And the string? Why, if the person who brought the baby—parent or grandmother, midwife or obliging friend—were of a humane disposition and did not care to let the new-born child drop to the bottom (for underneath the tower was a deep pit), it could be let down gently by means of the string. The odour was the odour of putrefaction. A lively little boy came up to me while I stood there and made me understand that four babes had been brought to the tower that morning.

There are philosophers who look upon evil with a certain complacency, since without it, they opine, there would be no possibility of good. Without want there would be no occasion for charity, without distress for sympathy, without danger for courage, and without unhappiness for resignation. They would find in the Chinese practice of infanticide an apt illustration of their views. Except for the baby tower there would not be in this city an orphanage; the traveller would miss an interesting and curious sight, and a few poor women would have no opportunity to exercise a beautiful and touching virtue. The orphanage is shabby and bedraggled; it is situated in a poor and crowded part of the city, for the Spanish nuns who conduct it—there are but five of them—think it more convenient to live where they may be most useful; and besides, they have not the money to build commodious premises in a salubrious quarter. The institution is supported by the work, lace and fine embroidery, which they teach the girls to do, and by the alms of the faithful.

Two nuns, the Mother Superior and another, showed me what there was to see. It was very strange to go through the white-washed rooms, work-rooms, play-rooms, dormitories, and refectory, low, cool, and bare; for you might have been in Spain, and when you passed a window you half-expected to catch a glimpse of the Giralda. And it was charming to see the tenderness with which the nuns used the children. There were two hundred of them and they were, of course, orphans only in the sense that their parents had abandoned them. There was one room in which

a number were playing, all of the same age, perhaps four, and all of the same size; with their black eyes and black hair, their yellow skins, they all looked so much alike that they might have been the children of a Chinese Old Woman who lived in a Shoe. They crowded round the nuns and began to romp with them. The Mother Superior had the gentlest voice I ever heard, but it became gentler still when she joked with the tiny mites. They nestled about her. She looked a very picture of charity. Some were deformed and some were diseased, some were puny and hideous, some were blind; it gave me a little shudder: I marvelled when I saw the love that filled her kind eyes and the affectionate sweetness of her smile.

Then I was taken into a parlour where I was made to eat little sweet Spanish cakes and given a glass of Manzanilla to drink, and when I told them that I had lived in Seville a third nun was sent for, so that she might talk for a few minutes with someone who had seen the city she was born in. With pride they showed me their poor little chapel with its tawdry statue of the Blessed Virgin, its paper flowers, and its gaudy, shoddy decoration; for those dear faithful hearts, alas! were possessed of singularly bad taste. I did not care: to me there was something positively touching in that dreadful vulgarity. And when I was on the point of leaving, the Mother Superior asked me whether I would care to see the babies who had come in that day. In order to persuade people to bring them they gave twenty cents for every one. Twenty cents!

"You see," she explained, "they have often a long walk to come here and unless we give them something they won't take the trouble."

She took me into a little ante-room, near the entrance, and there lying on a table under a counterpane were four new-born babes. They had just been washed and put into long clothes. The counterpane was lifted off. They lay side by side, on their backs, four tiny wriggling mites, very red in the face, rather cross perhaps because they had been bathed, and very hungry. Their eyes seemed preternaturally large. They were so small, so helpless: you were forced to smile when you looked at them and at the same time you felt a lump in your throat.

XLIII

NIGHTFALL

TOWARDS evening perhaps, tired of walking, you get into your chair and on the crest of a hill you pass through a stone gateway. You cannot tell why there should be a gateway in that deserted spot, far from a village, but a fragment of massive wall suggests the ruin of fortifications against the foes of a forgotten dynasty. And when you come through the gateway you see below you the shining water in the rice fields, diapered, like the chess-board in some Chinese *Alice in Wonderland*, and then the rounded, tree-clad hills. But making your way down the stone steps of the narrow causeway which is the high road from city to city, in the gathering darkness you pass a coppice, and from it waft towards you chill woodland odours of the night. Then you hear no longer the measured tread of your bearers, your ears are on a sudden deaf to their sharp cries as they change the pole from shoulder to shoulder, and to the ceaseless chatter or the occasional snatch of song with which they enliven the monotonous way, for the woodland odours are the same as those which steal up from the fat Kentish soil when you pass through the woods of Bleane; and nostalgia seizes you. Your thoughts travel through time and space, far from the Here and Now, and you remember your vanished youth with its high hopes, its passionate love, and its ambition. Then if you are a cynic, as they say, and therefore a sentimentalist, tears come to your unwilling eyes. And when you have regained your self-control the night has fallen.

THE NORMAL MAN

I WAS once obliged to study anatomy, a very dreary business, since there is neither rhyme nor reason for the vast number of things you have to remember; but one remark made by my teacher, when he was helping me in the dissection of a thigh, has always remained in my memory. I was looking in vain for a certain nerve and it needed his greater skill to discover it in a place in which I had not sought it. I was aggrieved because the text-book had misled me. He smiled and said:

"You see, the normal is the rarest thing in the world."

And though he spoke of anatomy he might have spoken with equal truth of man. The casual observation impressed itself upon me as many a profounder one has not and all the years that have passed since then, with the increasing knowledge of human nature which they have brought, have only strengthened my conviction of its truth. I have met a hundred men who seemed perfectly normal, only to find in them presently an idiosyncrasy so marked as to put them almost in a class by themselves. It has entertained me not a little to discover the hidden oddity of men to all appearances most ordinary. I have been often amazed to come upon a hideous depravity in men who you would have sworn were perfectly commonplace. I have at last sought the normal man as a precious work of art. It has seemed to me that to know him would give me that peculiar satisfaction which can only be described as æsthetic.

I really thought I had found him in Robert Webb. He was a consul in one of the smaller ports and I was given a letter to him. I heard a good deal about him on my way through China and I heard nothing but good. Whenever I happened to mention that I was going to the port in which he was stationed someone was sure to say:

"You'll like Bob Webb. He's an awfully good chap."

He was no less popular as an official than he was as a private person. He managed to please the merchants because he was active in their interests, without antagonising the Chinese who praised his firmness or the missionaries who approved his private

life. During the revolution by his tact, decision, and courage he had not only saved from great danger the foreign population of the city in which he then was, but also many Chinese. He had come forward as a peacemaker between the warring parties and by his ingenuity had been able to bring about a satisfactory settlement. He was marked down for promotion. I certainly found him a very engaging fellow. Though he was not good-looking his appearance was pleasing; he was tall, perhaps a little more than of average height, well covered without being fat, with a fresh complexion inclined now (for he was nearly fifty) to be somewhat bloated in the morning. This was not strange, for in China the foreigners both eat and drink a great deal too much, and Robert Webb had a healthy liking for the good things of life. He kept an excellent table. He liked eating in company and it was seldom that he did not have one or two people to tiffin or to dinner with him. His eyes were blue and friendly. He had the social gifts that give pleasure: he played the piano quite well, but he liked the music that other people liked, and he was always ready to play a one-step or a waltz if others wanted to dance. With a wife, a son, and a daughter in England he could not afford to keep racing ponies, but he was keenly interested in racing; he was a good tennis player, and his bridge was better than the average. Unlike many of his colleagues he did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by his position, and in the evening at the club he was affable and unaffected. But he did not forget that he was His Britannic Majesty's Consul and I admired the skill with which without portentousness he preserved the dignity which he thought necessary to his station. In short he had very good manners. He talked agreeably, and his interests, though somewhat ordinary, were varied. He had a nice sense of humour. He could make a joke and tell a good story. He was very happily married. His son was at Charterhouse and he showed me a photograph of a tall, fair lad in flannels, with a frank and pleasant face. He showed me also the photograph of his daughter. It is one of the tragedies of life in China that a man must be separated for long periods from his family, and owing to the war Robert Webb had not seen his for eight years. His wife had taken the children home when the boy was eight and the girl eleven. They had meant to wait till his leave came so that they could go all together, but he was stationed in a place that suited neither of the children and he and his wife agreed that she had better take them at once. His leave was due in three years and

then he could spend twelve months with them. But when the time for this came the war broke out, the consular staff was short-handed, and it was impossible for him to leave his post. His wife did not want to be separated from young children, the journey was difficult and dangerous, no one expected the war to last so long, and one by one the years passed.

"My girl was a child when I saw her last," he said to me when he showed me the photograph. "Now she's a married woman."

"When are you going on leave?" I asked him.

"Oh, my wife's coming out now."

"But don't you want to see your daughter?" I asked.

He looked at the photograph again and then looked away. There was a curious look in his face, a somewhat peevish look, I thought, and he answered:

"I've been away from home too long now. I shall never go back."

I leaned back in my chair, smoking my pipe. The photograph showed me a girl of nineteen with wide blue eyes and bobbed hair; it was a pretty face, open and friendly, but the most noticeable thing about it was a peculiar charm of expression. Bob Webb's daughter was a very alluring young person. I liked that engaging audacity.

"It was rather a surprise to me when she sent along that photograph," he said presently. "I'd always thought of her as a child. If I'd met her in the street I shouldn't have known her."

He gave a little laugh that was not quite natural.

"It isn't fair. . . . When she was a child she used to love being petted."

His eyes were fixed on the photograph. I seemed to see in them a very unexpected emotion.

"I can hardly realise she's my daughter. I thought she'd come back with her mother, and then she wrote and said she was engaged."

He looked away now and I thought there was a singular embarrassment in the down-turned corners of his mouth.

"I suppose one gets selfish out here; I felt awfully sore, but I gave a big dinner party to all the fellows here the day she was married, and we all got blind."

He gave an apologetic laugh.

"I had to, you know," he said awkwardly. "I had such an awful hump."

"What's the young man like?" I asked.

"She's awfully in love with him. When she writes to me her letters are about nothing else." There was an odd quaver in his voice. "It's a bit thick to bring a child into the world and to educate her and be fond of her and all that sort of thing just for some man whom you've never even seen. I've got his photograph somewhere, I don't know where it is. I don't think I'd care about him very much."

He helped himself to another whisky. He was tired. He looked old and bloated. He said nothing for a long time, and then suddenly he seemed to pull himself together.

"Well, thank God, her mother's coming out soon."

I don't think he was quite a normal man after all.

THE OLD TIMER

HE was seventy-six years old. He had come to China when he was little more than a boy as second mate of a sailing vessel and had never gone home again. Since then he had been many things. For long years he had commanded a Chinese boat that ran from Shanghai to Ichang and he knew by heart every inch of the great and terrible Yangtze. He had been master of a tug at Hong Kong and had fought in the Ever-Victorious Army. He had got a lot of loot in the Boxer troubles and had been in Hankow during the revolution when the rebels shelled the city. He had been married three times, first to a Japanese woman, then to a Chinese, and finally when he was hard upon fifty to an Englishwoman. They were all dead now and it was the Japanese who lingered in his memory. He would tell you how she arranged the flowers in the house in Shanghai, just one chrysanthemum in a vase or a sprig of cherry blossom; and he always remembered how she held a tea-cup, with both hands, delicately. He had had a number of children, but he took no interest in them; they were settled in the various ports of China, in banks and shipping offices, and he seldom saw them. He was proud of his daughter by his English wife, the only girl he ever had, but she had married well and was gone to England. He would never see her again. The only person now for whom he had any affection was the boy who had been with him for five and forty years. He was a little wizened Chinaman, with a bald head, slow of movement and solemn. He was well over sixty. They quarrelled incessantly. The old timer would tell the boy that he was past his work and that he must get rid of him, and then the boy would say that he was tired of serving a mad foreign devil. But each knew that the other did not mean a word he said. They were old friends, old men both of them, and they would remain together till death parted them.

It was when he married his English wife that he retired from the water and put his savings into a hotel. But it was not a success. It was a little way from Shanghai, a summer resort, and it was before there were motor-cars in China. He was a sociable fellow and he spent too much of his time in the bar. He was generous

and he gave away as many drinks as were paid for. He also had the peculiar habit of spitting in the bath and the more squeamish of his visitors objected to it. When his last wife died he found it was she who had kept things from going to pieces, and in a little while he could no longer bear up against the difficulty of his circumstances. All his savings had gone into buying the place, now heavily mortgaged, and in making up the deficit year by year. He was obliged to sell out to a Japanese and, having paid his debts, at the age of sixty-eight found himself without a penny. But, by God, sir, he was a sailor. One of the companies running boats up the Yangtze gave him a berth as chief officer—he had no master's certificate—and he returned to the river which he knew so well. For eight years he had been on the same run.

And now he stood on the bridge of his trim little ship, not so large as a penny steamer on the Thames, a gallant figure, upright and slender as when he was a lad, in a neat blue suit and the company's cap set jauntily on his white hair, with his pointed beard nattily trimmed. Seventy-six years old. It is a great age. With his head thrown back, his glasses in his hand, the Chinese pilot by his side, he watched the vast expanse of the winding river. A fleet of junks with their high sterns, their square sails set, descended on the swift current, and the rowers chanted a monotonous chant as they worked at their creaking oars. The yellow water in the setting sun was lovely with pale, soft tints, it was as smooth as glass; and along the flat banks the trees and the huts of a bedraggled village, hazy in the heat of the day, were now silhouetted sharply, like the shadows of a shadowgraph, against the pale sky. He raised his head as he heard the cry of wild geese and he saw them flying high above him in a great V to what far lands he knew not. In the distance against the sunlight stood a solitary hill crowned with temples. Because he had seen all this so often it affected him strangely. The dying day made him think, he knew not why, of his long past and of his great age. He regretted nothing.

"By George," he muttered, "I've had a fine life."

XLVI

THE PLAIN

THE incident was of course perfectly trivial, and it could be very easily explained; but I was surprised that the eyes of the spirit could blind me so completely to what was visible to the eyes of sense. I was taken aback to find how completely one could be at the mercy of the laws of association. Day after day I had marched among the uplands and to-day I knew that I must come to the great plain in which lay the ancient city whither I was bound; but when I set out in the morning there was no sign that I approached it. Indeed the hills seemed no less sheer and when I reached the top of one, thinking to see the valley below, it was only to see before me one steeper and taller yet. Beyond, climbing steadily, I could see the white causeway that I had followed so long, shining in the sunlight as it skirted the brow of a rugged, tawny rock. The sky was blue and in the west hung here and there little clouds like fishing-boats becalmed towards evening off Dungeness. I trudged along, mounting all the time, alert for the prospect that awaited me, if not round this bend, then round the next, and at last, suddenly, when I was thinking of other things, I came upon it. But it was no Chinese landscape that I saw, with its padi fields, its memorial arches and its fantastic temples, with its farmhouses set in a bamboo grove and its wayside inns where under the banyan trees the poor coolies may rest them of their weary loads; it was the valley of the Rhine, the broad plain all golden in the sunset, the valley of the Rhine with its river, a silvery streak, running through it, and the distant towers of Worms; it was the great plain upon which my young eyes rested, when, a student in Heidelberg, after walking long among the fir-clad hills above the old city, I came out upon a clearing. And because I was there first conscious of beauty; because there I knew the first glow of the acquisition of knowledge (each book I read was an extraordinary adventure); because there I first knew the delight of conversation (oh, those wonderful commonplaces which each boy discovers as though none had discovered them before); because of the morning stroll in the sunny Anlage, the cakes and coffee which refreshed my abstemious youth at the end of a

strenuous walk, the leisurely evenings on the castle terrace, with the smoky blue haze over the tumbled roofs of the old town below me; because of Goethe and Heine and Beethoven and Wagner and (why not?) Strauss with his waltzes, and the beer-garden where the band played and girls with yellow plaits walked sedately; because of all these things—recollections which have all the force of the appeal of sense—to me not only does the word *plain* mean everywhere and exclusively the valley of the Rhine; but the only symbol for happiness I know is a wide prospect all golden in the setting sun, with a shining stream of silver running through it, like the path of life or like the ideal that guides you through it, and far away the grey towers of an ancient town.

XLVII

FAILURE

A LITTLE man, portly, in a fantastic hat, like a bushranger's, with an immense brim, a pea-jacket such as you see in Leech's pictures of the sea-faring man, and very wide check trousers of a cut fashionable heaven knows how many years ago. When he takes off his hat you see a fine head of long curly hair, and though he is approaching the sixties it is scarcely grey. His features are regular. He wears a collar several sizes too large for him so that his whole neck, massive and statuesque, is shown. He has the look of a Roman Emperor in a tragedy of the 'sixties and this air of an actor of the old school is enhanced by his deep booming voice. His stumpy frame makes it slightly absurd. You can imagine his declaiming the blank verse of Sheridan Knowles with an emphasis to rouse the pit to frenzy, and when he greets you, with too large a gesture, you guess how that resonant organ would tremble when he wrung your heart (in 1860) over the death of his child. It was splendid a little later to hear him ask the Chinese servant for "me boots, boy, me boots. A kingdom for me boots". He confessed that he should have been an actor.

"To be or not to be, that was the question, but me family, me family, dear boy, they would have died of the disgrace, and so I was exposed to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

IN short he came out to China as a tea-taster. But he came when the Ceylon tea was already ousting the Chinese and it was no longer possible for the merchant to enrich himself in a few years. But the old lavishness endured and life was led in a grand style when the means to pay for it no longer existed. The struggle became harder. Finally came the Sino-Japanese war and, with the loss of Formosa, ruin. The tea-taster looked about for other means of livelihood. He became a wine-merchant, an undertaker, an estate-agent, a broker, an auctioneer. He tried every way of making money that his ardent imagination suggested, but with the diminishing prosperity of the port his efforts were bootless. Life was too much for him. And now at last he had the pitiful air of a broken man; there was even something touching in it, like the appeal of a woman who cannot believe in the loss of her beauty

and implores the compliment which reassures but no longer convinces her. And yet, notwithstanding, he had a solace: he had still a magnificent assurance; he was a failure and he knew it; but it did not really affect him, for he was the victim of fate: no shadow of a doubt in his own capacity had ever crossed his mind.

XLVIII

A STUDENT OF THE DRAMA

HE sent in a neat card of the correct shape and size, deeply bordered in black, upon which under his name was printed *Professor of Comparative Modern Literature*. He turned out to be a young man, small, with tiny, elegant hands, with a larger nose than you see as a rule in the Chinese and gold-rimmed spectacles. Though it was a warm day he was dressed, in European clothes, in a suit of heavy tweed. He seemed a trifle shy. He spoke in a high falsetto, as though his voice had never broken, and those shrill notes gave I know not what feeling of unreality to his conversation. He had studied in Geneva and in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and he expressed himself fluently in English, French, and German.

It appeared that he lectured on the drama and he had lately written, in French, a work on the Chinese theatre. His studies abroad had left him with a surprising enthusiasm for Scribe, and this was the model he proposed for the regeneration of the Chinese drama. It was curious to hear him demand that the drama should be exciting. He was asking for the *pièce bien faite*, the *scène à faire*, the curtain, the unexpected, the dramatic. The Chinese theatre, with its elaborate symbolism, has been what we are always crying for, the theatre of ideas; and apparently it has been perishing of dullness. It is true that ideas do not grow on every gooseberry bush, they need novelty to make them appetising, and when they are stale they stink as badly as stale fish. .

But then, remembering the description on the card, I asked my friend what books, English and French, he recommended his students to read in order to familiarise themselves with the current literature of the day. He hesitated a little.

"I really don't know," he said at last; "you see, that's not my branch, I only have to do with drama; but if you're interested I'll ask my colleague who lectures on European fiction to call on you."

"I beg your pardon," I said.

"Have you read *Les Avariés*?" he asked. "I think that is the finest play that has been produced in Europe since Scribe."

"Do you?" I said politely.

"Yes, you see our students are greatly interested in sociological questions."

It is my misfortune that I am not, and so as deftly as I could I led the conversation to Chinese philosophy, which I was desultorily reading. I mentioned Chuang-Tzu. The professor's jaw fell.

"He lived a very long time ago," he said, perplexed.

"So did Aristotle," I murmured pleasantly.

"I have never studied the philosophers," he said, "but of course we have at our university a Professor of Chinese Philosophy and if you are interested in that I will ask him to come and call on you."

It is useless to argue with a pedagogue, as the Spirit of the Ocean (somewhat portentously to my mind) remarked to the Spirit of the River, and I resigned myself to discuss the drama. My professor was interested in its technique and indeed was preparing a course of lectures on the subject, which he seemed to think both complicated and abstruse. He flattered me by asking me what were the secrets of the craft.

"I know only two," I answered. "One is to have common sense and the other is to stick to the point."

"Does it require no more than that to write a play?" he inquired with a shade of dismay in his tone.

"You want a certain knack," I allowed, "but no more than to play billiards."

"They lecture on the technique of the drama in all the important universities of America," said he.

"The Americans are an extremely practical people," I answered. "I believe that Harvard is instituting a chair to instruct grandmothers how to suck eggs."

"I do not think I quite understand you."

"If you can't write a play no one can teach you, and if you can it's as easy as falling off a log."

Here his face expressed a lively perplexity, but I think only because he could not make up his mind whether this operation came within the province of the Professor of Physics or within that of the Professor of Applied Mechanics.

"But if it is so easy to write a play, why do dramatists take so long about it?"

"They didn't, you know. Lope de Vega and Shakespeare and a hundred others wrote copiously and with ease. Some modern playwrights have been perfectly illiterate men and have found it an

almost insuperable difficulty to put two sentences together. A celebrated English dramatist once showed me a manuscript and I saw that he had written the question 'Will you have sugar in your tea?' five times before he could put it in this form. A novelist would starve if he could not on the whole say what he wanted to without any beating about the bush."

"You would not call Ibsen an illiterate man, and yet it is well known that he took two years to write a play."

"It is obvious that Ibsen found a prodigious difficulty in thinking of a plot. He racked his brain furiously, month after month, and at last in despair used the very same that he had used before."

"What do you mean?" the professor cried, his voice rising to a shrill scream. "I do not understand you at all."

"Have you not noticed that Ibsen uses the same plot over and over again? A number of people are living in a closed and stuffy room, then someone comes (from the mountains or from over the sea) and flings the window open; everyone gets a cold in the head and the curtain falls."

I thought it just possible that the shadow of a smile might lighten for a moment the professor's grave face, but he knit his brows and gazed for two minutes into space. Then he rose.

"I will peruse the works of Henrik Ibsen once more with that point of view in mind," he said.

I did not omit before he left to put him the question which one earnest student of the drama always puts another when per-adventure they meet. I asked him, namely, what he thought was the future of the theatre. I had an idea that he said "Oh hell!", but on reflection I believe his exclamation must have been "O ciel!" He sighed, he shook his head, he threw up his elegant hands; he looked the picture of dejection. It was certainly a comfort to find that all thoughtful people considered the drama's state in China no less desperate than all thoughtful people consider it in England.

XLIX

THE TAIWAN

NO one knew better than he that he was an important person. He was number one in not the least important branch of the most important English firm in China. He had worked his way up through solid ability and he looked back with a faint smile at the callow clerk who had come out to China thirty years before. When he remembered the modest home he had come from, a little red house in a long row of little red houses, in Barnes, a suburb which, aiming desperately at the genteel, achieves only a sordid melancholy, and compared it with the magnificent stone mansion, with its wide verandas and spacious rooms, which was at once the office of the company and his own residence, he chuckled with satisfaction. He had come a long way since then. He thought of the high tea to which he sat down when he came home from school (he was at St. Paul's), with his father and mother and his two sisters, a slice of cold meat, a great deal of bread and butter and plenty of milk in his tea, everybody helping himself, and then he thought of the state in which now he ate his evening meal. He always dressed and whether he was alone or not he expected the three boys to wait at table. His number one boy knew exactly what he liked and he never had to bother himself with the details of housekeeping; but he always had a set dinner with soup and fish, entrée, roast, sweet and savoury, so that if he wanted to ask anyone in at the last moment he could. He liked his food and he did not see why when he was alone he should have less good a dinner than when he had a guest.

He had indeed gone far. That was why he did not care to go home now; he had not been to England for ten years, and he took his leave in Japan or Vancouver, where he was sure of meeting old friends from the China coast. He knew no one at home. His sisters had married in their own station, their husbands were clerks and their sons were clerks; there was nothing between him and them; they bored him. He satisfied the claims of relationship by sending them every Christmas a piece of fine silk, some elaborate embroidery, or a case of tea. He was not a mean man and as long as his mother lived he had made her an allowance.

But when the time came for him to retire he had no intention of going back to England, he had seen too many men do that and he knew how often it was a failure; he meant to take a house near the race-course in Shanghai: what with bridge and his ponies and golf he expected to get through the rest of his life very comfortably. But he had a good many years before he need think of retiring. In another five or six Higgins would be going home and then he would take charge of the head office in Shanghai. Meanwhile he was very happy where he was; he could save money, which you couldn't do in Shanghai, and have a good time into the bargain. This place had another advantage over Shanghai: he was the most prominent man in the community and what he said went. Even the consul took care to keep on the right side of him. Once a consul and he had been at loggerheads and it was not he who had gone to the wall. The taipan thrust out his jaw pugnaciously as he thought of the incident.

But he smiled, for he felt in an excellent humour. He was walking back to his office from a capital luncheon at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. They did you very well there. The food was first-rate and there was plenty of liquor. He had started with a couple of cocktails, then he had some excellent sauterne and he had finished up with two glasses of port and some fine old brandy. He felt good. And when he left he did a thing that was rare with him; he walked. His bearers with his chair kept a few paces behind him in case he felt inclined to slip into it, but he enjoyed stretching his legs. He did not get enough exercise these days. Now that he was too heavy to ride it was difficult to get exercise. But if he was too heavy to ride he could still keep ponies, and as he strolled along in the balmy air he thought of the spring meeting. He had a couple of griffins that he had hopes of and one of the lads in his office had turned out a fine jockey (he must see they didn't sneak him away, old Higgins in Shanghai would give a pot of money to get him over there) and he ought to pull off two or three races. He flattered himself that he had the finest stable in the city. He pouted his broad chest like a pigeon. It was a beautiful day, and it was good to be alive.

He paused as he came to the cemetery. It stood there, neat and orderly, as an evident sign of the community's opulence. He never passed the cemetery without a little glow of pride. He was pleased to be an Englishman. For the cemetery stood in a place, valueless when it was chosen, which with the increase of the city's

affluence was now worth a great deal of money. It had been suggested that the graves should be moved to another spot and the land sold for building, but the feeling of the community was against it. It gave the taipan a sense of satisfaction to think that their dead rested on the most valuable site on the island. It showed that there were things they cared for more than money. Money be blown! When it came to "the things that mattered" (this was a favourite phrase with the taipan), well, one remembered that money wasn't everything.

And now he thought he would take a stroll through. He looked at the graves. They were neatly kept and the pathways were free from weeds. There was a look of prosperity. And as he sauntered along he read the names on the tombstones. Here were three side by side: the captain, the first mate, and the second mate of the barque *Mary Baxter*, who had all perished together in the typhoon of 1908. He remembered it well. There was a little group of two missionaries, their wives and children, who had been massacred during the Boxer troubles. Shocking thing that had been! Not that he took much stock in missionaries; but, hang it all, one couldn't have these damned Chinese massacring them. Then he came to a cross with a name on it he knew. Good chap, Edward Mulock, but he couldn't stand his liquor, drank himself to death, poor devil, at twenty-five: the taipan had known a lot of them do that; there were several more neat crosses with a man's name on them and the age, twenty-five, twenty-six, or twenty-seven; it was always the same story: they had come out to China; they had never seen so much money before, they were good fellows and they wanted to drink with the rest; they couldn't stand it, and there they were in the cemetery. You had to have a strong head and a fine constitution to drink drink for drink on the China coast. Of course it was very sad, but the taipan could hardly help a smile when he thought how many of those young fellows he had drunk underground. And there was a death that had been useful, a fellow in his own firm, senior to him and a clever chap too: if that fellow had lived he might not have been taipan now. Truly the ways of fate were inscrutable. Ah, and here was little Mrs. Turner, Violet Turner, she had been a pretty little thing, he had had quite an affair with her; he had been devilish cut up when she died. He looked at her age on the tombstone. She'd be no chicken if she were alive now. And as he thought of all those dead people a sense of satisfaction spread through him. He had beaten them

all. They were dead and he was alive, and, by George, he'd scored them off. His eyes collected in one picture all those crowded graves and he smiled scornfully. He very nearly rubbed his hands.

"No one ever thought I was a fool," he muttered.

He had a feeling of good-natured contempt for the gibbering dead. Then, as he strolled along, he came suddenly upon two coolies digging a grave. He was astonished, for he had not heard that anyone in the community was dead.

"Who the devil's that for?" he said aloud.

The coolies did not even look at him; they went on with their work, standing in the grave, deep down, and they shovelled up heavy clods of earth. Though he had been so long in China he knew no Chinese, in his day it was not thought necessary to learn the damned language, and he asked the coolies in English whose grave they were digging. They did not understand. They answered him in Chinese and he cursed them for ignorant fools. He knew that Mrs. Broome's child was ailing and it might have died, but he would certainly have heard of it, and besides that wasn't a child's grave, it was a man's, and a big man's too. It was uncanny. He wished he hadn't gone into that cemetery; he hurried out and stepped into his chair. His good humour had all gone and there was an uneasy frown on his face. The moment he got back to his office he called to his number two:

"I say, Peters, who's dead, d'you know?"

But Peters knew nothing. The taipan was puzzled. He called one of the native clerks and sent him to the cemetery to ask the coolies. He began to sign his letters. The clerk came back and said the coolies had gone and there was no one to ask. The taipan began to feel vaguely annoyed: he did not like things to happen of which he knew nothing. His own boy would know, his boy always knew everything, and he sent for him; but the boy had heard of no death in the community.

"I knew no one was dead," said the taipan irritably. "But what's the grave for?"

He told the boy to go to the overseer of the cemetery and find out what the devil he had dug a grave for when no one was dead.

"Let me have a whisky and soda before you go," he added, as the boy was leaving the room.

He did not know why the sight of the grave had made him uncomfortable. But he tried to put it out of his mind. He felt better when he had drunk the whisky, and he finished his work. He

went upstairs and turned over the pages of *Punch*. In a few minutes he would go to the club and play a rubber or two of bridge before dinner. But it would ease his mind to hear what his boy had to say and he waited for his return. In a little while the boy came back and he brought the overseer with him.

"What are you having a grave dug for?" he asked the overseer point-blank. "Nobody's dead."

"I no dig grave," said the man.

"What the devil do you mean by that? There were two coolies digging a grave this afternoon."

The two Chinese looked at one another. Then the boy said they had been to the cemetery together. There was no new grave there.

The taipan only just stopped himself from speaking.

"But, damn it all, I saw it myself," were the words on the tip of his tongue.

But he did not say them. He grew very red as he choked them down. The two Chinese looked at him with their steady eyes. For a moment his breath failed him.

"All right. Get out," he gasped.

But as soon as they were gone he shouted for the boy again, and when he came, maddeningly impassive, he told him to bring some whisky. He rubbed his sweating face with a handkerchief. His hand trembled when he lifted the glass to his lips. They could say what they liked, but he had seen the grave. Why, he could hear still the dull thud as the coolies threw the spadefuls of earth on the ground above them. What did it mean? He could feel his heart beating. He felt strangely ill-at-ease. But he pulled himself together. It was all nonsense. If there was no grave there it must have been an hallucination. The best thing he could do was to go to the club, and if he ran across the doctor he would ask him to give him a look-over.

Everyone in the club looked just the same as ever. He did not know why he should have expected them to look different. It was a comfort. These men, living for many years with one another lives that were methodically regulated, had acquired a number of little idiosyncrasies—one of them hummed incessantly while he played bridge, another insisted on drinking beer through a straw—and these tricks which had so often irritated the taipan now gave him a sense of security. He needed it, for he could not get out of his head that strange sight he had seen; he played bridge

very badly; his partner was censorious, and the taipan lost his temper. He thought the men were looking at him oddly. He wondered what they saw in him that was unaccustomed.

Suddenly he felt he could not bear to stay in the club any longer. As he went out he saw the doctor reading *The Times* in the reading-room, but he could not bring himself to speak to him. He wanted to see for himself whether that grave was really there and stepping into his chair he told his bearers to take him to the cemetery. You couldn't have an hallucination twice, could you? And besides, he would take the overseer in with him and if the grave was not there he wouldn't see it, and if it was he'd give the overseer the soundest thrashing he'd ever had. But the overseer was nowhere to be found. He had gone out and taken the keys with him. When the taipan found he could not get into the cemetery he felt suddenly exhausted. He got back into his chair and told his bearers to take him home. He would lie down for half an hour before dinner. He was tired out. That was it. He had heard that people had hallucinations when they were tired. When his boy came in to put out his clothes for dinner it was only by an effort of will that he got up. He had a strong inclination not to dress that evening, but he resisted it: he made it a rule to dress, he had dressed every evening for twenty years and it would never do to break his rule. But he ordered a bottle of champagne with his dinner and that made him feel more comfortable. Afterwards he told the boy to bring him the best brandy. When he had drunk a couple of glasses of this he felt himself again. Hallucinations be damned! He went to the billiard-room and practised a few difficult shots. There could not be much the matter with him when his eye was so sure. When he went to bed he sank immediately into a sound sleep.

But suddenly he awoke. He had dreamed of that open grave and the coolies digging leisurely. He was sure he had seen them. It was absurd to say it was an hallucination when he had seen them with his own eyes. Then he heard the rattle of the night watchman going his rounds. It broke upon the stillness of the night so harshly that it made him jump out of his skin. And then terror seized him. He felt a horror of the winding multitudinous streets of the Chinese city, and there was something ghastly and terrible in the convoluted roofs of the temples with their devils grimacing and tortured. He loathed the smells that assaulted his nostrils. And the people. Those myriads of blue-clad coolies, and the

beggars in their filthy rags, and the merchants and the magistrates, sleek, smiling, and inscrutable, in their long black gowns. They seemed to press upon him with menace. He hated the country. China. Why had he ever come? He was panic-stricken now. He must get out. He would not stay another year; another month. What did he care about Shanghai?

"Oh, my God," he cried, "if I were only safely back in England!"

He wanted to go home. If he had to die he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces. He wanted to be buried at home, not in that grave he had seen that day. He could never rest there. Never. What did it matter what people thought? Let them think what they liked. The only thing that mattered was to get away while he had the chance.

He got out of bed and wrote to the head of the firm and said he had discovered he was dangerously ill. He must be replaced. He could not stay longer than was absolutely necessary. He must go home at once.

They found the letter in the morning clenched in the taipan's hand. He had slipped down between the desk and the chair. He was stone dead.

L

METEMPSYCHOSIS

HE was decently though far from richly clad. He had a small round cap of black silk on his head, and on his feet black silk shoes. His robe was pale green of the flowered silk which is made in Chiating, and over it he wore a short black jacket. He was an old man, with a white beard, long and for a Chinese full; his broad face, much wrinkled, especially between the brows, was benign, and his large horn spectacles did not conceal the friendliness of his eyes. He had all the look of one of those sages whom you may see in an old picture seated by a bamboo grove at the foot of a great rocky mountain contemplating the Eternal Way. But now his face bore an expression of great annoyance and his kindly eyes were frowning, for he was engaged in the singular occupation (for a man of his appearance) of leading a little black pig along the causeway between the flooded padi fields. And the little black pig, with sudden jerks, with unexpected dodging, ran hither and thither, in every direction but that in which the old gentleman wished to go. He pulled the string violently, but the pig, squealing, refused to follow; he addressed it in terms of expostulation and of abuse, but the little pig sat on his haunches and looked at him with malicious eyes. Then I knew that in the Tang dynasty the old gentleman had been a philosopher who had juggled with facts, as philosophers will, making them suit the whims which he called his theories; and now, after who knows how many existences, he was expiating his sins in suffering in his turn the stubborn tyranny of the facts which he had outraged.

LI

THE FRAGMENT

WHEN you travel in China I think nothing amazes you more than the passion for decoration which possesses the Chinese. It is not astonishing that you should find decoration in memorial arches or in temples; here the occasion for it is obvious; and it is natural enough to find it in furniture; nor does it surprise, though it delights you, to discover it on the commoner objects of household use. The pewter pot is enriched with a graceful design; the coolie's rice bowl has its rough but not inelegant adornment. You may fancy that the Chinese craftsman does not look upon an article as complete till by line or colour he has broken the plainness of a surface. He will even print an arabesque on the paper he uses for wrapping. But it is more unexpected when you see the elaborate embellishment of a shop-front, the splendid carving, gilt or relieved with gold, of its counter, and the intricate sculpture of the signboard. It may be that this magnificence serves as an advertisement; but it does so only because the passer-by, the possible customer, takes pleasure in elegance; and you are apt to think that the tradesman who owns the shop takes pleasure in it too. When he sits at his door, smoking his water-pipe and through his great horn spectacles reading a newspaper, his eyes must rest with good humour sometimes on the fantastic ornamentation. On the counter, in a long-necked pot, stands a solitary carnation.

You will find the same delight in the ornate in the poorest villages where the severity of a door is mitigated by a charming piece of carving, and where the trellis of the windows forms a complicated and graceful pattern. You can seldom cross a bridge, in however unfrequented a district, without seeing in it the hand of an artist. The stones are so laid as to make an intricate decoration, and it seems as though these singular people judged with a careful eye whether a flat bridge or an arched one would fit in best with the surrounding scene. The balustrade is ornamented with lions or with dragons. I remember a bridge that must have been placed just where it was for the pure delight of its beauty rather than for any useful purpose, since, though broad enough for a

carriage and pair to pass over it, it served only to connect a narrow path that led from one ragged village to another. The nearest town was thirty miles away. The broad river, ~~narrowing~~ ^{narrows} at this point, flowed between two green hills, and nut trees grew on the bank. The bridge had no balustrade. It was constructed of immense slabs of granite and rested on five piers; the middle pier consisted of a huge and fantastic dragon with a long and scaly tail. On the sides of the outer slabs, running the whole length of the bridge, was cut in very low relief a pattern of an unimaginable lightness, delicacy and grace.

But though the Chinese take such careful pains to avoid fatiguing your eye, with sure taste making the elaborateness of a decoration endurable by contrasting it with a plain surface, in the end weariness overcomes you. Their exuberance bewilders. You cannot refuse your admiration to the ingenuity with which they so diversify the ideas that occupy them as to give you an impression of changing fantasy, but the fact is plain that the ideas are few. The Chinese artist is like a fiddler who with infinite skill should play infinite variations upon a single tune.

Now, I happened upon a French doctor who had been in practice for many years in the city in which I then found myself; and he was a collector of porcelain, bronze, and embroidery. He took me to see his things. They were beautiful, but they were a trifle monotonous. I admired perfunctorily. Suddenly I came upon the fragment of a bust.

"But that is Greek," I said, in surprise.

"Do you think so?" I am glad to hear you say it."

Head and arms were gone, and the statue, for such it had been, was broken off just above the waist, but there was a breastplate, with a sun in the middle of it, and in relief Perseus killing the dragon. It was a fragment of no great importance, but it was Greek, and perhaps because I was surfeited with Chinese beauty it affected me strangely. It spoke in a tongue with which I was familiar. It rested my heart. I passed my hands over its age-worn surface with a delight I was myself surprised at. I was like a sailor who, wandering in a tropic sea, has known the lazy loveliness of coral islands and the splendours of the cities of the East, but finds himself once more in the dingy alleys of a Channel port. It is cold and grey and sordid, but it is England.

The doctor—he was a little bald man, with gleaming eyes and an excitable manner—rubbed his hands.

"Do you know it was found within thirty miles of here, on this side of the Tibetan frontier?"

"Found!" I exclaimed. "Found where?"

"*Mon Dieu*, in the ground. It had been buried for two thousand years. They found this and several fragments more, one or two complete statues, I believe, but they were broken up and only this remained."

It was incredible that Greek statues should have been discovered in so remote a spot.

"But what is your explanation?" I asked.

"I think this was a statue of Alexander," he said.

"By George!"

It was a thrill. Was it possible that one of the commanders of the Macedonian, after the expedition into India, had found his way into this mysterious corner of China under the shadow of the mountains of Tibet? The doctor wanted to show me Manchu dresses, but I could not give them my attention. What bold adventurer was he who had penetrated so far towards the East to found a kingdom? There he had built a temple to Aphrodite and a temple to Dionysus, and in the theatre actors had sung the *Antigone* and in his halls at night bards had recited the *Odyssey*. And he and his men listening may have felt themselves the peers of the old seaman and his followers. What magnificence did that stained fragment of marble call up and what fabulous adventures! How long had the kingdom lasted and what tragedy marked its fall? Ah, just then I could not look at Tibetan banners or celadon cups; for I saw the Parthenon, severe and lovely, and beyond, serene, the blue *Ægean*.

ONE OF THE BEST

I COULD never remember his name, but whenever he was spoken of in the port he was always described as one of the best. He was a man of fifty perhaps, thin and rather tall, dapper and well-dressed, with a small, neat head and sharp features. His blue eyes were good-natured and jovial behind his pince-nez. He was of a cheerful disposition, and he had a vein of banter which was not ineffective. He could turn out the sort of jokes that make men standing at the club bar laugh heartily, and he could be agreeably malicious, but without ill-nature, about any member of the community who did not happen to be present. His humour was of the same nature as that of the comedian in a musical play. When they spoke of him they often said:

"You know, I wonder he never went on the stage. He'd have made a hit. One of the best."

He was always ready to have a drink with you and no sooner was your glass empty than he was prompt with the China phrase: "Ready for the other half?"

But he did not drink more than was good for him.

"Oh, he's got his head screwed on his shoulders the right way" they said. "One of the best."

When the hat was passed round for some charitable object he could always be counted on to give as much as anyone else, and he was always ready to go in for a golf competition or a billiards tournament. He was a bachelor.

"Marriage is no use to a man who lives in China," he said. "He has to send his wife away every summer and then when the kids are beginning to be interesting they have to go home. It costs a deuce of a lot of money and you get nothing out of it."

But he was always willing to do a good turn to any woman in the community. He was number one at Jardine's, and he often had the power to make himself useful. He had been in China for thirty years, and he prided himself on not speaking a word of Chinese. He never went into the Chinese city. His compradore was Chinese, and some of the clerks, his boys of course, and the

chair coolies; but they were the only Chinese he had anything to do with, and quite enough too.

"I hate the country, I hate the people," he said. "As soon as I've saved enough money I mean to clear out."

He laughed.

"Do you know, last time I was home I found everyone cracked over Chinese junk, pictures and porcelain, and stuff. Don't talk to me about Chinese things, I said to 'em. I never want to see anything Chinese as long as I live."

He turned to me.

"I'll tell you what, I don't believe I've got a single Chinese thing in my house."

But if you wanted him to talk to you about London he was prepared to do so by the hour. He knew all the musical comedies that had been played for twenty years and at the distance of nine thousand miles he was able to keep up with the doings of Miss Lily Elsie and Miss Elsie Janis. He played the piano and he had a pleasing voice; it required little persuasion to induce him to sit down and sing you the popular ditties he had heard when last he was at home. It was quite singular to me, the unfathomable frivolity of this grey-haired man; it was even a little uncanny. But people applauded him loudly when he finished.

"He's priceless, isn't he?" they said. "Oh, one of the best."

LIII

THE SEA-DOG

SHIPS' captains for the most part are very dull men. Their conversation is of freights and cargoes. They have seen little more in the ports they visit than their agent's office, the bar which their kind frequents, and the bawdy houses. They owe the glamour of romance which their connection with the sea has cast over them to the imagination of the landsman. To them the sea is a means of livelihood, and they know it, as an engine-driver knows his engine, from a standpoint which is aridly practical. They are men, working men, of a narrow outlook, with small education for the most part and little culture; they are all of a piece, and they have neither subtlety nor imagination. Straightforward, courageous, honest, and reliable, they stand four-square on the immutability of the obvious; and they are definite: they are placed in their surroundings like the objects in a stereoscopic photograph so that you seem to see all round them. They offer themselves to you with salient traits.

But no one could have adhered less to type than Captain Boots. He was the master of a little Chinese steamer on the Upper Yangtze and because I was his only passenger we spent a good deal of time in one another's company. But though he was fluent of speech, garrulous even, I see him shadowily; and he remains in my mind indistinctly. I suppose it is on account of his elusiveness that he engages my imagination. There was certainly nothing elusive in his appearance. He was a big man, six foot two, powerfully built, with large features and a red, friendly face. When he laughed he showed a row of handsome gold teeth. He was very bald, and clean-shaven; but he had the most bushy, abundant, and aggressive eyebrows that I have ever seen, and under them mild blue eyes. He was a Dutchman, and though he had left Holland when he was eight he still spoke with an accent. He could not pronounce 'th', but always made it 'd'. His father, a fisherman who sailed his own schooner on the Zuyder Zee, hearing that fishing was good in Newfoundland, had set out with his wife and his two sons across the broad Atlantic. After some years there and in Hudson's Bay—all this was hard on half a century ago—they had

sailed round the Horn for the Behring Straits. They hunted seal until the law stepped in to save the beasts they were exterminating, and then Boots, a man now and a brave one, God knows, sailed here and there, as third, then as second, mate on sailing vessels. He had been almost all his life in sail and now on a steamer could not make himself at home.

"It's only in a sailing boat you get comfort," he said. "Dere's no comfort anywhere when you got steam."

He had been all along the coast of South America after nitrates, then to the west coast of Africa, then again, fishing cod off the coast of Maine, to America; and after that with cargoes of salt fish to Spain and Portugal. A tavern acquaintance in Manila suggested that he should try the Chinese Customs. He went to Hong Kong, where he was taken on as a tide-waiter, and presently was put in command of a steam launch. He spent three years, chasing the opium smugglers and then, having saved a little money, built himself a forty-five-ton schooner with which he determined to go to the Behring Straits and try his luck again with the seal fishery.

"But I guess my crew got scared," he said. "When I got to Shanghai dey deserted and I couldn't get no oder, so I had to sell de boat and I shipped on a vessel what was going to Vancouver."

It was then he first left the sea. He met a man who was pushing a patent hay-fork and this he agreed to take round the States. It was a queer occupation for a sailor-man, and it was not a successful one, for at Salt Lake City, the firm that employed him having gone bankrupt, he found himself stranded. Somehow or other he got back to Vancouver, but he was taken with the idea of life ashore, and he found work with an estate-agent. It was his duty to take the purchasers of land to their plots and if they were not satisfied persuade them that they need not regret their bargain.

"We sold one fellow a farm on de side of a mountain," he said, his blue eyes twinkling at the recollection, "an' it was so steep dat de chickens had one leg longer dan de oder."

After five years he had the idea that he would like to go back to China. He had no difficulty in getting a job as mate of a ship sailing west and soon he was at the old life once more. Since then he had been on most of the China runs, from Vladivostok to Shanghai, from Amoy to Manila, and on all the big rivers; on steamers now, rising from second to first mate, and at last, on Chinese-owned ships, to master. He talked willingly of his plans for the future. He had been in China long enough, and he hankered after a farm

on the Fraser River. He would build himself a boat and do a bit of fishing, salmon and halibut.

"It's time I settled down," he said. "Fifty-dree years I've been to sea. An' I shouldn't wonder but what I did a bit of boat building too. I'm not one to stick to one ding."

There he was right and this restlessness of his translated itself into a curious indecision of character. There was something fluid about him so that you did not know where to take hold of him. He reminded you of a scene of mist and rain in a Japanese print where the design, barely suggested, almost escapes you. He had a peculiar gentleness which was somewhat unexpected in the rough old salt.

"I don't want to offend anyone," he said. "Treat 'em kindly, dat's what I try to do. If people won't do what you want, talk to 'em nicely, persuade 'em. Dere's no need to be nasty. Try what coaxing'll do."

It was a principle which it was unusual to find used with the Chinese, and I do not know that it answered very well, for after some difficulty he would come into the cabin, wave his hands, and say:

"I can do noding wid dem. Dey won't listen to reason."

And then his moderation looked very like weakness. But he was no fool. He had a sense of humour. At one place we were drawing over seven feet, and since the river at its shallowest was barely that and the course was dangerous the harbour authorities would not give us our papers till part of the cargo was unloaded. It was the ship's last trip and she was carrying the pay of regiments stationed several days down-stream. The military governor refused to let the ship start unless the bullion was taken.

"I guess I got to do what you tell me," said Captain Boots to the harbour master.

"You don't get your papers till I see the five-foot mark above the water," answered the harbour master.

"I'll tell the compradore to take out some of dat silver."

He took the harbour master up to the Customs' Club and stood him drinks while this was being done. He drank with him for four hours, and when he returned he walked as steadily as when he went. But the harbour master was drunk.

"Ah, I see dey've got it down two foot," said Captain Boots. "Dat's all right, den."

The harbour master looked at the numbers on the ship's side

and sure enough the five-foot mark was at the water's edge.

"That's good," he said. "And now you can go."

"I'll be off right away," said the captain.

Not a pound of cargo had been removed, but an astute China man had neatly repainted the numbers.

And later when mutinous regiments with an eye on the silver we carried sought to prevent us from leaving one of the riverside cities he showed an agreeable firmness. His equable temper was tried and he said:

"No one's going to make me stay where I don't want to. I'm de master of dis ship and I'm de man what gives de orders. I'm going."

The agitated compradore said the military would fire if we attempted to move. An officer uttered a command and the soldiers, going down on one knee, levelled their rifles. Captain Boots looked at them.

"Put down de bullet-proof screen," he said. "I tell you I'm going and de Chinese army can go to hell."

He gave his order, to raise the anchor and at the same time the officer gave the order to fire. Captain Boots stood on his bridge, a somewhat grotesque figure, for in his old blue jersey, with his red face and burly frame, he looked the very image of those ancient fishermen that you see lounging about Grimsby docks, and he rang his bell. We steamed out slowly to the spatter of rifle shots.

THE QUESTION

THEY took me to the temple. It stood on the side of a hill with a semi-circle of tawny mountains behind it, staging it, as it were, with a formal grandeur; and they pointed out to me with what exquisite art the series of buildings climbed the hill till you reached the final edifice, a jewel of white marble encircled by the trees; for the Chinese architect sought to make his creation an ornament to nature and he used the accidents of the landscape to complete his decorative scheme. They pointed out to me how cunningly the trees were planted to contrast with the marble of a gateway, to give an agreeable shadow here, or there to serve as a background; and they made me remark the admirable proportion of those great roofs, rising one beyond the other in rich profusion, with the grace of flowers; and they showed me that the yellow tiles were of different hues so that the sensibility was not offended by an expanse of colour but amused and pleased by a subtle variety of tone. They showed me how the elaborate carving of a gateway was contrasted with a surface without adornment so that the eye was not wearied. All this they showed me as we walked through elegant courtyards, over bridges which were a miracle of grace, through temples with strange gods, dark and gesticulating; but when I asked them what was the spiritual state which had caused all this mass of building to be made, they could not tell me.

THE SINOLOGUE

HE is a tall man, rather stout, flabby as though he does not take enough exercise, with a red, clean-shaven, broad face and grey hair. He talks very quickly, in a nervous manner, with a voice not quite big enough for his body. He lives in a temple just outside the city gate, inhabiting the guest chambers, and three Buddhist priests, with a tiny acolyte, tend the temple and conduct the rites. There is a little Chinese furniture in the rooms and a vast number of books, but no comfort. It is cold and the study in which we sit is insufficiently warmed by a petroleum stove.

He knows more Chinese than any man in China. He has been working for ten years on a dictionary which will supersede that of a noted scholar whom for a quarter of a century he has personally disliked. He is thus benefiting sinological studies and satisfying a private grudge. He has all the manner of a don and you feel that eventually he will be Professor of Chinese at the University of Oxford and then at last exactly in his place. He is a man of wider culture than most sinologues, who may know Chinese, and this you must take on trust, but who, it is lamentably obvious, know nothing else; and his conversation upon Chinese thought and literature has in consequence a fullness and a variety which you do not often find among students of the language. Because he has immersed himself in his particular pursuits and has cared nothing for racing and shooting the Europeans think him queer. They look upon him with the suspicion and awe with which human beings always regard those who do not share their tastes. They suggest that he is not quite sane and some accuse him of smoking opium. It is the charge which is always brought against the white man who has sought to familiarise himself with the civilisation in which he is to pass the greater part of his career. You have only to spend a little while in that apartment bare of the most common luxury to know that this is a man who leads a life wholly of the spirit.

But it is a specialised life. Art and beauty seem not to touch him, and as I listen to him talk so sympathetically of the Chinese poets I cannot help asking myself if the best things have not after

all slipped through his fingers. Here is a man who has touched reality only through the printed page. The tragic splendour of the lotus moves him only when its loveliness is enshrined in the verse of Li Po and the laughter of demure Chinese girls stirs his blood but in the perfection of an exquisitely chiselled quatrain.

THE VICE-CONSUL

HIS bearers set down his chair in the yamen and unfastened the apron which protected him from the pouring rain. He put out his head, like a bird looking out of its nest, and then his long, thin body and finally his thin, long legs. He stood for a moment as if he did not quite know what to do with himself. He was a very young man and his long limbs with their ungainliness somehow added to the callowness of his air. His round face (his head looked too small for the length of his body) with its fresh complexion was quite boyish, and his pleasant brown eyes were ingenuous and candid. The sense of importance which his official position gave him (it was not long since he had been no more than a student-interpreter) struggled with his native shyness. He gave his card to the judge's secretary and was led by him into an inner court and asked to sit down. It was cold and draughty and the vice-consul was glad of his heavy waterproof. A ragged attendant brought tea and cigarettes. The secretary, an emaciated youth in a very shabby black gown, had been a student at Harvard and was glad to show off his fluent English.

Then the judge came in, and the vice-consul stood up. The judge was a portly gentleman in heavily wadded clothes, with a large smiling face and gold-rimmed spectacles. They sat down and sipped their tea and smoked American cigarettes. They chatted affably. The judge spoke no English, but the vice-consul's Chinese was fresh in his mind and he could not help thinking that he acquitted himself creditably. Presently an attendant appeared and said a few words to the judge, and the judge very courteously asked the vice-consul if he was ready for the business which had brought him. The door into the outer court was thrown open and the judge, walking through, took his place on a large seat at a table that stood at the top of the steps. He did not smile now. He had assumed instinctively the gravity proper to his office and in his walk, notwithstanding his obesity, there was an impressive dignity. The vice-consul, obeying a polite gesture, took a seat by

his side. The secretary stood at the end of the table. Then the outer gateway was flung wide (it seemed to the vice-consul that there was nothing so dramatic as the opening of a door) and quickly, with an odd sort of flurry, the criminal walked in. He walked to the centre of the courtyard and stood still, facing his judge. On each side of him walked a soldier in khaki. He was a young man and the vice-consul thought that he could be no older than himself. He wore only a pair of cotton trousers and a cotton singlet. They were faded but clean. He was bare-headed and bare-foot. He looked no different from any of the thousands of coolies in their monotonous blue that you passed every day in the crowded streets of the city. The judge and the criminal faced one another in silence. The vice-consul looked at the criminal's face, but then he looked down quickly: he did not want to see what was there to be seen so plainly. He felt suddenly embarrassed. And looking down he noticed how small the man's feet were, shapely and slender; his hands were tied behind his back. He was slightly built, of the middle height, a lissome creature that suggested the wild animal, and standing on those beautiful feet of his there was in his carriage a peculiar grace. But the vice-consul's eyes were drawn back unwillingly to the oval, smooth, and unlined face. It was livid. The vice-consul had often read of faces that were green with terror and he had thought it but a fanciful expression, and here he saw it. It startled him. It made him feel ashamed. And in the eyes too, eyes that did not slant as the Chinese eye is wrongly supposed always to do, but were straight, in the eyes that seemed unnaturally large and bright, fixed on those of the judge, was a terror that was horrible to see. But when the judge put him a question—trial and sentence were over and he had been brought there that morning only for purposes of identification—he answered in a loud, plain voice, boldly. However his body might betray him he was still master of his will. The judge gave a brief order and, flanked by his two soldiers, the man marched out. The judge and the vice-consul rose and walked to the gateway, where their chairs awaited them. Here stood the criminal with his guard. Notwithstanding his tied hands he smoked a cigarette. A squad of little soldiers had been sheltering themselves under the overhanging roof, and on the appearance of the judge the officer in charge made them form up. The judge and the vice-consul settled themselves in their chairs. The officer gave an order and the squad stepped out. A couple of yards behind

them walked the criminal. Then came the judge in his chair and finally the vice-consul.

They went quickly through the busy streets and the shopkeepers gave the procession an incurious stare. The wind was cold and the rain fell steadily. The criminal in his cotton singlet must have been wet through. He walked with a firm step, his head held high, jauntily almost. It was some distance from the judge's yamen to the city wall and to cover it took them nearly half an hour. Then they came to the city gate and went through it. Four men in ragged blue—they looked like peasants—were standing against the wall by the side of a poor coffin, rough-hewn and unpainted. The criminal gave it a glance as he passed by. The judge and the vice-consul dismounted from their chairs and the officer halted his soldiers. The rice fields began at the city wall. The criminal was led to a pathway between two patches and told to kneel down. But the officer did not think the spot suitable. He told the man to rise. He walked a yard or two and knelt down again. A soldier was detached from the squad and took up his position behind the prisoner, three feet from him perhaps; he raised his gun; the officer gave the word of command; he fired. The criminal fell forward and he moved a little, convulsively. The officer went up to him, and seeing that he was not quite dead emptied two barrels of his revolver into the body. Then he formed up his soldiers once more. The judge gave the vice-consul a smile, but it was a grimace rather than a smile; it distorted painfully that fat, good-humoured face.

They stepped into their chairs; but at the city gate their ways parted; the judge bowed the vice-consul a courteous farewell. The vice-consul was carried back towards the consulate through the streets, crowded and tortuous, where life was going on just as usual. And as he went along quickly, for the consular bearers were fine fellows, his mind distracted a little by their constant shouts to make way, he thought how terrible it was to make an end of life deliberately: it seemed an immense responsibility to destroy what was the result of innumerable generations. The human race has existed so long and each one of us is here as the result of an infinite series of miraculous events. But at the same time, puzzling him, he had a sense of the triviality of life. One more or less mattered so little. But just as he reached the consulate he looked at his watch; he had no idea it was so late, and he told the bearers to take him to the club. It was time for a

cocktail and, by heaven, he could do with one. A dozen men were standing at the bar when he went in. They knew on what errand he had been that morning.

"Well," they said, "did you see the blighter shot?"

"You bet I did," he said, in a loud and casual voice.

"Everything go off all right?"

"He wriggled a bit." He turned to the bar-tender. "Same as usual, John."

LVII

A CITY BUILT ON A ROCK

THEY say of it that the dogs bark when peradventure the sun shines there. It is a grey and gloomy city, shrouded in mist, for it stands upon its rock where two great rivers meet so that it is washed on all sides but one by turbid, rushing waters. The rock is like the prow of an ancient galley and seems, as though possessed of a strange, unnatural life, all tremulous with effort; it is as if it were ever on the point of forging into the tumultuous stream. Rugged mountains hem the city round about.

Outside the walls bedraggled houses are built on piles, and here, when the river is low, a hazardous population lives on the needs of the watermen; for at the foot of the rock a thousand junks are moored, wedged in with one another tightly, and men's lives there have all the turbulence of the river. A steep and tortuous stairway leads to the great gate guarded by a temple, and up and down this all day long go the water coolies, with their dripping buckets; and from their splashing the stair and the street that leads from the gate are wet as though after heavy rain. It is difficult to walk on the level for more than a few minutes, and there are as many steps as in the hill towns of the Italian Riviera. Because there is so little space the streets are pressed together, narrow and dark, and they wind continuously so that to find your way is like finding it in a labyrinth. The throng is as thick as the throng on a pavement in London when a theatre is emptying itself of its audience. You have to push your way through it, stepping aside every moment as chairs come by and coolies bearing their everlasting loads; itinerant sellers, selling almost anything that anyone can want to buy, jostle you as you pass.

The shops are wide open to the street, without windows or doors, and they are crowded too. They are like an exhibition of arts and crafts, and you may see what a street looked like in medieval England when each town made all that was necessary to its needs. The various industries are huddled together so that you will pass through a street of butchers where carcasses and entrails hang bloody on each side of you, with flies buzzing about them and mangy dogs prowling hungrily below; you will pass

through a street where in each house there is a hand-loom and they are busily weaving cloth or silk. There are innumerable eating-houses from which come heavy odours and here at all hours people are eating. Then, generally at a corner, you will see tea-houses, and here all day long again the tables are packed with men of all sorts drinking tea and smoking. The barbers ply their trade in the public view and you will see men leaning patiently on their crossed arms while their heads are being shaved; others are having their ears cleaned, and some, a revolting spectacle, the inside of their eyelids scraped.

It is a city of a thousand noises. There are the peddlers who announce their presence by a wooden gong; the clappers of the blind musician or of the masseuse; the shrill falsetto of a man singing in a tavern; the loud beating of a gong from a house where a wedding or a funeral is being celebrated. There are the raucous shouts of the coolies and chair-bearers; the menacing whines of the beggars, caricatures of humanity, their emaciated limbs barely covered by filthy tatters and revolting with disease; the cracked melancholy of the bugler who incessantly practises a call he can never get; and then, like a bass to which all these are a barbaric melody, the insistent sound of conversation, of people laughing, quarrelling, joking, shouting, arguing, gossiping. It is a ceaseless din. It is extraordinary at first, then confusing, exasperating, and at last maddening. You long for a moment's utter silence. It seems to you that it would be a voluptuous delight.

And then combining with the irksome throng and the din that exhausts your ears is a stench which time and experience enable you to distinguish into a thousand separate stenches. Your nostrils grow cunning. Foul odours beat upon your harassed nerves like the sound of uncouth instruments playing a horrible symphony.

You cannot tell what are the lives of these thousands who surge about you. Upon your own people sympathy and knowledge give you a hold; you can enter into their lives, at least imaginatively, and in a way really possess them. By the effort of your fancy you can make them after a fashion part of yourself. But these are as strange to you as you are strange to them. You have no clue to their mystery. For their likeness to yourself in so much does not help you; it serves rather to emphasise their difference. Someone attracts your attention, a pale youth with great horn spectacles and a book under his arm, whose studious look is pleasant, or an old man, wearing a hood, with a grey sparse beard and tired eyes: he

looks like one of those sages that the Chinese artists painted in a rocky landscape or under Kang-hsi modelled in porcelain; but you might as well look at a brick wall. You have nothing to go upon, you do not know the first thing about them, and your imagination is baffled.

But when, reaching the top of the hill, you come once more to the crenellated walls that surround the city and go out through the frowning gate, you come to the graves. They stretch over the country, one mile, two miles, three, four, five, interminable green mounds, up and down the hills, with grey stones to which the people once a year come to offer libation and to tell the dead how fare the living whom they left behind; and they are as thickly crowded, the dead, as are the living in the city; and they seem to press upon the living as though they would force them into the turbid, swirling river. There is something menacing about those serried ranks. It is as though they were laying siege to the city, with a sullen ruthlessness, biding their time; and as though in the end, encroaching irresistibly as fate, they would drive those seething throngs before them till the houses and the streets were covered by them, and the green mounds came down to the water gate. Then at last silence, silence would dwell there undisturbed.

They are uncanny, those green graves, they are terrifying. They seem to wait.

LVIII

A LIBATION TO THE GODS

SHE was an old woman, and her face was wizened and deeply lined. In her grey hair three long silver knives formed a fantastic headgear. Her dress of faded blue consisted of a long jacket, worn and patched, and a pair of trousers that reached a little below her calves. Her feet were bare, but on one ankle she wore a silver bangle. It was plain that she was very poor. She was not stout, but squarely built, and in her prime she must have done without effort the heavy work in which her life had been spent. She walked leisurely, with the sedate tread of an elderly woman, and she carried on her arm a basket. She came down to the harbour; it was crowded with painted junks; her eyes rested for a moment curiously on a man who stood on a narrow bamboo raft, fishing with cormorants; and then she set about her business. She put down her basket on the stones of the quay, at the water's edge, and took from it a red candle. This she lit and fixed in a chink of the stones. Then she took several joss-sticks, held each of them for a moment in the flame of the candle and set them up around it. She took three tiny bowls and filled them with a liquid that she had brought with her in a bottle and placed them neatly in a row. Then from her basket she took rolls of paper cash and paper "shoes", and unravelled them, so that they should burn easily. She made a little bonfire, and when it was well alight she took the three bowls and poured out some of their contents before the smouldering joss-sticks. She bowed herself three times and muttered certain words. She stirred the burning paper so that the flames burned brightly. Then she emptied the bowls on the stones and again bowed three times. No one took the smallest notice of her. She took a few more paper cash from her basket and flung them in the fire. Then without further ado she took up her basket, and with the same leisurely, rather heavy tread walked away. The gods were duly propitiated, and, like an old peasant woman in France who has satisfactorily done her day's house-keeping, she went about her business.

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PARLOUR

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PARLOUR

I

I HAVE never been able to feel for Charles Lamb the affection that he inspires in most of his readers. There is a cross-grain in my nature that makes me resent the transports of others and gush will dry up in me (against my will, for heaven knows I have no wish to chill by my coldness the enthusiasm of my neighbours) the capacity of admiration. Too many critics have written of Charles Lamb with insipidity for me ever to have been able to read him without uneasiness. He is like one of those persons of overflowing heart who seem to lie in wait for disaster to befall you so that they may envelope you with their sympathy. Their arms are so quickly outstretched to raise you when you fall that you cannot help asking yourself, as you rub your barked shin, whether by any chance they did not put in your path the stone that tripped you up. I am afraid of people with too much charm. They devour you. In the end you are made a sacrifice to the exercise of their fascinating gift and their insincerity. Nor do I much care for writers whose charm is their chief asset. It is not enough. I want something to get my teeth into, and when I ask for roast beef and Yorkshire pudding I am dissatisfied to be given bread and milk. I am put out of countenance by the sensibility of the Gentle Elia. For a generation Rousseau had pinned every writer's heart to his sleeve and it was in his day still the fashion to write with a lump in the throat, but Lamb's emotion to my mind too often suggests the facile lachrymosity of the alcoholic. I cannot but think his tenderness would have been advantageously tempered by abstinence, a blue pill and a black draught. Of course when you read the references made to him by his contemporaries, you discover that the Gentle Elia is an invention of the sentimentalists. He was a more robust, irascible and intemperate fellow than they have made him out, and he would have laughed (and with justice) at the portrait they have painted of him. If you had met him one evening at Benjamin Haydon's, you would have seen a grubby little person, somewhat the worse for liquor, who could be very dull, and if he made a joke it might as easily have been a bad as a good one. In fact, you would have met Charles Lamb and not the Gentle Elia.

And if you had read that morning one of his essays in *The London Magazine* you would have thought it an agreeable trifle. It would never have occurred to you that this pleasant piece would serve one day as a pretext for the lucubrations of the learned. You would have read it in the right spirit; for to you it would have been a living thing. It is one of the misfortunes to which the writer is subject that he is too little praised when he is alive and too much when he is dead. The critics force us to read the classics as Machiavelli wrote, in court dress; whereas we should do much better to read them, as though they were our contemporaries, in a dressing-gown.

And because I had read Lamb in deference to common opinion rather than from inclination I had forborne to read Hazlitt at all. What with the innumerable books it urgently imported me to read, I came to the conclusion that I could afford to neglect a writer who had but done mediocresly (I understood) what another had done with excellence. And the Gentle Elia bored me. It was seldom I had read anything about Lamb without coming across a fling and a sneer at Hazlitt. I knew that FitzGerald had once intended to write a life of him, but had given up the project in disgust of his character. He was a mean, savage, nasty little man and an unworthy hanger-on of the circle in which Lamb, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth shone with so bright a lustre. There seemed no need to waste my time on a writer of so little talent and of so unpleasant a nature. But one day, about to start on a long journey, I was wandering round Bumpus's looking for books to take with me when I came across a selection of Hazlitt's Essays. It was an agreeable little volume in a green cover, and nicely printed, cheap in price and light to hold, and out of curiosity to know the truth about an author of whom I had read so much ill, I put it on the pile that I had already collected.

II

WHEN I had settled down on the boat that was taking me up the Irrawaddy to Pagan I got the little green volume out of my bag to read on the way. The boat was crowded with natives. They lay about on their beds surrounded by a great many small pieces of luggage and ate and gossiped all day long. There were among them a number of monks in yellow robes, their heads

shaven, and they smoked cheroots in silence. Occasionally one passed a raft of teak logs, with a little thatched house on it, going down-stream to Rangoon, and caught a brief glimpse of the family that lived on it busy with the preparation of a meal or cosily eating it. It looked a placid life that they led, with long hours of repose and ample leisure for the exercise of an idle curiosity. The river was broad and muddy, and its banks were flat. Now and then one saw a pagoda, sometimes spick and span and white, but more often crumbling to pieces; and now and then one came to a riverside village nestling amiably among great green trees. On the landing-stage was a dense throng of noisy, gesticulating people in bright dresses and they looked like flowers on a stall in a market-place; there was a turmoil and a confusion, shouting, a hurry and scurry as a mass of little people, laden with their belongings, got off, and another mass of little people, laden too, got on.

River travelling is monotonous and soothing. In whatever part of the world you are it is the same. No responsibility rests on your shoulders. Life is easy. The long day is divided into neat parts by the meals and you very soon acquire a sense that you have no longer an individuality; you are a passenger occupying a certain berth and the statistics of the company show that you have occupied that berth at this season for a certain number of years and will continue to do so long enough to make the company's shares a sound investment.

I began to read my Hazlitt. I was astonished. I found a solid writer, without pretentiousness, courageous to speak his mind, sensible and plain, with a passion for the arts that was neither gushing nor forced, various, interested in the life about him, ingenious, sufficiently profound for his purposes, but with no affectation of profundity, humorous, sensitive. And I liked his English. It was natural and racy, eloquent when eloquence was needed, easy to read, clear and succinct, neither below the weight of his matter nor with fine phrases trying to give it a specious importance. If art is nature seen through the medium of a personality, Hazlitt is a great artist.

I was enraptured. I could not forgive myself that I had lived so long without reading him and I raged against the idolaters of Elia whose foolishness had deprived me till now of so vivid an experience. Here certainly was no charm, but what a robust mind, sane, clear-cut and vivacious, and what vigour! Presently I came across the rich essay which is entitled *On Going a Journey* and I

reached the passage that runs: "Oh! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *The Gentleman in the Parlour!*" I could wish that Hazlitt had used fewer dashes in this passage. There is in the dash something rough, ready and haphazard that goes against my grain. I have seldom read a sentence in which it could not be well replaced by the elegant semi-colon or the discreet bracket. But I had no sooner read these words than it occurred to me that here was an admirable name for a book of travel and I made up my mind to write it.

III

I LET the book fall to my knees and looked at the river flowing silently. The immense volume of slow-moving water gave me an exquisite sensation of inviolate peace. The night fell softly as a green leaf in summer falls softly to the ground. But trying for a moment to fight against the pleasant idleness of spirit that stole over me, I sorted in my memory the impressions that Rangoon had left on me.

It was a gay and sunny morning when the ship that I had taken at Colombo steamed up the Irrawaddy. They pointed out to me the tall chimneys of the Burmah Oil Company and the air was grey and misty with their smoke. But behind the smoke rose the golden spire of the Shwe Dagon. And now I found that my recollections were entirely pleasing, but nebulous; a cordial welcome, a drive in an American car through busy streets of business houses, concrete and iron like the streets, good heavens! of Honolulu, Shanghai, Singapore, or Alexandria, and then a spacious, shady house in a garden; an agreeable life, luncheon at this club or that, drives along trim, wide roads, bridge after dark at that club or this, gin *pahits*, a great many men in white drill or pongee silk, laughter, pleasant conversation; and then back through the night to dress for dinner and out again to dine with this hospitable host or the other, cocktails, a substantial meal, dancing to a gramophone, or a game of billiards, and then back

once more to the large, cool, silent house. It was very attractive, easy, comfortable, and gay; but was this Rangoon? Down by the harbour and along the river were narrow streets, a rabbit warren of intersecting alleys; and here, multitudinous, lived the Chinese, and there the Burmans: I looked with curious eyes as I passed in my motor-car and wondered what strange things I should discover and what secrets they had to tell me if I could plunge into that enigmatic life and lose myself in it as a cup of water thrown overboard is lost in the Irrawaddy. Rangoon. And now I found that in my recollections, so vague and uncertain, the Shwe Dagon rose superb as on that first morning it had risen, glistening with its gold, like a sudden hope in the dark night of the soul of which the mystics write, glistening against the fog and smoke of the thriving city.

A Burmese gentleman having asked me to dine with him, I went to his office whither I was bidden. It was gaily decorated with streamers of paper flowers. A large round table stood in the middle. I was introduced to a number of his friends and we sat down. There were a great many courses, most of which were rather cold, and the food, served in little bowls, swam in copious sauces. Round the centre of the tables were bowls of Chinese tea, but champagne flowed freely, too freely, and after dinner liqueurs of all kinds were passed round. We were all very jolly. Then the table was taken away and the chairs were put against the wall. My amiable host asked for permission to bring in his wife, and she came with a friend, two pretty little women with large, smiling eyes, and sat down shyly; but they soon found the position on European chairs uncomfortable and so sat with their legs under them as though they were sitting on the floor. An entertainment had been provided for my diversion and the performers made their entrance. Two clowns, an orchestra and half a dozen dancers. One of them, they told me, was an artist celebrated through all Burma. The dancers wore silk shirts and tight jackets, and they had flowers in their dark hair. They sang in a loud, forced voice so that the veins of their necks swelled with the effort, and they danced not together, but in turn, and their gestures were like the gestures of marionettes. Meanwhile the clowns uttered their merry quips: back and forth went the dialogue between them and the dancers, and it was evidently of a facetious character, for my host and his guests laughed loudly.

For some time I had been watching the star. She certainly had

an air. She stood with her companions but with an effect of being apart from them, and on her face she wore a good-humoured but faintly supercilious smile, as though she belonged to another sphere. When the clowns attacked her with their gibes she answered them with a smiling detachment; she was playing her part in a rite as became her, but she proposed to give nothing of herself. She had the aloofness of complete self-confidence. Then her moment came. She stepped forward. She forgot that she was a star and became an actress.

But I had been expressing regret to my neighbours that I must leave Rangoon without seeing the Shwe Dagon; for the Burmese had made certain regulations, which the Buddhist faith did not demand, but to comply with which was humiliating to the Occidental; and to humiliate the Occidental was the object of the regulations. No Europeans any longer went into the wat-houses. But it is a stately pile and the most venerable place of worship in the country. It enshrines eight hairs from the head of the Buddha. My Burmese friends offered now to take me and I put my Western pride in my pocket. It was midnight. Arriving at the temple we went up a long stairway on each side of which were booths; but the people who lived in them to sell the devout what they might require had finished their work and some were sitting about, half-naked, chatting in undertones, smoking or eating a final meal. while many in all attitudes of abandonment were asleep, some on low native beds and some on the bare stones. Here and there, left over from the day before, were masses of dying flowers, lotus and jasmine and marigold; they scented the air heavily with a perfume in which was already an acrid decay. At last we reached the great terrace. All about, shrines and pagodas were jumbled pell-mell with the confusion with which trees grow in the jungle. They had been built without design or symmetry, but in the darkness, their gold and marble faintly gleaming, they had a fantastic richness. And then, emerging from among them like a great ship surrounded by lighters, rose dim, severe, and splendid, the Shwe Dagon. Lamps illumined with a sober glow the gilt with which it was covered. It towered, aloof, impressive, and mysterious against the night. A guardian walked noiselessly on his naked feet, an old man was lighting a row of candles before an image of the Buddha; they gave an emphasis to the solitude. Here and there a yellow-robed monk muttered a husky invocation; his droning punctuated the silence.

IV

SO that the reader of these pages may be under no misapprehension I hasten to tell him that he will find in them little information. This book is the record of a journey through Burma, the Shan States, Siam, and Indo-China. I am writing it for my own diversion and I hope that it will divert also such as care to spend a few hours in reading it. I am a professional writer and I hope to get from it a certain amount of money and perhaps a little praise.

Though I have travelled much I am a bad traveller. The good traveller has the gift of surprise. He is perpetually interested by the differences he finds between what he knows at home and what he sees abroad. If he has a keen sense of the absurd he finds constant matter for laughter in the fact that the people among whom he is do not wear the same clothes as he does, and he can never get over his astonishment that men may eat with chopsticks instead of forks or write with a brush instead of with a pen. Since everything is strange to him he notices everything, and according to his humour can be amusing or instructive. But I take things for granted so quickly that I cease to see anything unusual in my new surroundings. It seems to me so obvious for the Burman to wear a coloured *paso* that only by a deliberate effort can I make the observation that he is not dressed as I am. It seems to me just as natural to ride in a rickshaw as in a car, and to sit on the floor as on a chair, so that I forget that I am doing something odd and out-of-the-way. I travel because I like to move from place to place, I enjoy the sense of freedom it gives me, it pleases me to be rid of ties, responsibilities, duties, I like the unknown; I meet odd people who amuse me for a moment and sometimes suggest a theme for a composition; I am often tired of myself and I have a notion that by travel I can add to my personality and so change myself a little. I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I took.

It is true that should the historian of the Decline and Fall of the British Empire come across this book on the shelves of some public library he will have hard things to say of me. "How can one explain," he will ask, "that this writer, who in other places showed that he was not devoid of observation, could have gone through so many parts of this Empire and not noticed (for by

never a word is it apparent that a suspicion of anything of the sort crossed his mind) with what a nerveless hand the British held the power that their fathers had conquered? A satirist in his day, was there no matter for his derision in the spectacle of a horde of officials who held their positions only by force of the guns behind them trying to persuade the races they ruled that they were there only on sufferance? They offered efficiency to people to whom a hundred other things were of more consequence and sought to justify themselves by the benefits they conferred on people who did not want them. As if a man in whose house you have forcibly quartered yourself will welcome you any more because you tell him you can run it better than he can! Did he go through Burma and not see how the British power was tottering because the masters were afraid to rule, did he not meet judges, soldiers, commissioners who had no confidence in themselves and therefore inspired no respect in those they were placed over? What had happened to the race that had produced Clive, Warren Hastings, and Stamford Raffles, that it must send out to govern its colonies men who were afraid of the authority entrusted to them, men who thought to rule the Oriental by cajolery and submissiveness, by being unobtrusive, by pocketing affronts and giving the natives powers they were unfit to use and must inevitably turn against their masters? But what is a master whose conscience is troubled because he is a master? They prated of efficiency and they did not rule efficiently, for they were filled with an uneasy feeling that they were unfit to rule. They were sentimentalists. They wanted the profits of Empire, but would not assume the greatest of its responsibilities, which is power. But all this, which was staring him in the face, seems to have escaped this writer, and he contented himself with jotting down little incidents of travel, describing his emotions and inventing little stories about the persons he met; he produced a book that can be of no value to the historian, the political economist or the philosopher: it is deservedly forgotten."

I cock a snook at the historian of the Decline and Fall of the British Empire. On my side I venture to express the wish that when the time comes for him to write this great work he will write it with sympathy, justice, and magnanimity. I would have him eschew rhetoric, but I do not think a restrained emotion would ill become him. I would have him write lucidly and yet with dignity; I would have his periods march with a firm step. I should

like his sentences to ring out as the anvil rings when the hammer strikes it; his style should be stately but not pompous, picturesque without affectation or effort, lapidary, eloquent and yet sober; for when all is said and done he will have a subject upon which he may well expend all his pains: the British Empire will have been in the world's history a moment not without grandeur.

V

A LIGHT rain was falling and the sky was dark with heavy clouds when I reached Pagan. In the distance I saw the pagodas for which it is renowned. They loomed, huge, remote, and mysterious, out of the mist of the early morning like the vague recollections of a fantastic dream. The river steamer set me down at a bedraggled village some miles from my destination, and I waited in the drizzle while my servant found an ox-wagon to take me on my way. It was a springless cart on solid wooden wheels, covered with a coconut matting. Inside, it was hot and breathless, but the rain had increased to a steady downpour and I was thankful for its shelter. I lay full length and when I was tired of this sat cross-legged. The oxen went at a snail's pace, with cautious steps, and I was shaken and jolted as they ploughed their way through the tracks made by the carts that had gone before, and every now and then I was given a terrific jerk as the cart passed over a great stone. When I reached the circuit-house I felt as though I had been beaten and pummelled.

The circuit-house stood on the river bank, quite close to the water, and all round it were great trees, tamarinds, banyans, and wild gooseberries. A flight of wooden steps led to a broad veranda, which served as a living-room, and behind this were a couple of bedrooms, each with a bathroom. I found that one of these was occupied by another traveller, and I had but just examined the accommodation and talked to the Madrassi in charge about meals and taken stock of what pickles and canned goods and liquor he had on the premises when a little man appeared in a mackintosh and a topee dripping with rain. He took off his soaking things and presently we sat down to the meal known in this country as brunch. It appeared that he was a Czecho-Slovak, employed by a firm of exporters in Calcutta, and was spending his holiday seeing the sights of Burma. He was a

short man with wild black hair, a large face, a bold hooked nose, and gold-rimmed spectacles. His stingah-shifter fitted tightly over a corpulent figure. He was evidently an active and an energetic sight-seer; for the rain had not prevented him from going out in the morning and he told me that he had visited no less than seven pagodas. But the rain stopped while we were eating and soon the sun shone brightly. We had no sooner finished than he set out again. I do not know how many pagodas there are at Pagan; when you stand on an eminence they surround you as far as the eye can reach. They are almost as thickly strewn as the tombstones in a cemetery. They are of all sizes and in all states of preservation. Their solidity and size and magnificence are the more striking by reason of their surroundings, for they alone remain to show that here a vast and populous city once flourished. To-day there is only a straggling village with broad untidy roads lined with great trees, a pleasant enough little place with matting houses, neat and trim, in which live the workers in lacquer; for this is the industry on which Pagan, forgetful of its ancient greatness, now modestly thrives.

But of all these pagodas only one, the Ananda, is still a place of pilgrimage. Here are four huge gilded Buddhas standing against a gilded wall in a lofty gilded chamber. You look at them one by one through a gilded archway. In that glowing dimness they are inscrutable. In front of one a mendicant in his yellow robe chants in a high-pitched voice some litany that you do not understand. But the other pagodas are deserted. Grass grows in the chinks of the pavement and young trees have taken root in the crannies. They are the refuge of birds. Hawks wheel about their summits and little green parrots chatter in the eaves. They are like bizarre and monstrous flowers turned to stone. There is one in which the architect has taken as his model the lotus, as the architect of St. John's, Smith Square, took Queen Anne's footstool, and it has a baroque extravagance that makes the Jesuit churches in Spain seem severe and classical. It is preposterous, so that it makes you smile to look at it, but its exuberance is captivating. It is quite unreal, shoddy but strange, and you are staggered at the fantasy that could ever have devised it. It looks like the fabric of a single night made by the swarming hands of one of those wayward gods of the Indian mythology. Within the pagodas images of the Buddha sit in meditation. The gold leaf has long since worn away from the colossal figures and the figures are crumbling to dust. The

fantastic lions that guard the entrance ways are rotting on their pedestals.

A strange and melancholy spot. But my curiosity was satisfied with a visit to half a dozen of the pagodas, and I would not let the vigour of my Czecho-Slovak be a reproach to my indolence. He divided them into various types and marked them down in his notebook according to their peculiarities. He had theories about them, and in his mind they were neatly ticketed to support a theory or clinch an argument. None was so ruined that he did not think it worth while to give it his close and enthusiastic attention, and to examine the make and shape of tiles he climbed up broken places like a mountain goat. I preferred to sit idly on the veranda of the circuit-house and watch the scene before me. In the full tide of noon the sun burned all the colour from the landscape, so that the trees and the dwarf scrub, that grew wildly where in time past were the busy haunts of men, were pale and grey; but with the declining day the colour crept back, like an emotion that tempers the character and has been submerged for a while by the affairs of the world, and trees and scrub were again a sumptuous and living green. The sun set on the other side of the river and a red cloud in the west was reflected on the tranquil bosom of the Irrawaddy. There was not a ripple on the water. The river seemed no longer to flow. In the distance a solitary fisherman in a dug-out plied his craft. A little to one side but in full view was one of the loveliest of the pagodas. In the setting sun its colours, cream and fawn-grey, were soft like the silk of old dresses in a museum. It had a symmetry that was grateful to the eye; the turrets at one corner were repeated by the turrets at every other; and the flamboyant windows repeated the flamboyant doors below. The decoration had a sort of bold violence, as though it sought to scale fantastic pinnacles of the spirit and in the desperate struggle, with life and soul engaged, could not concern itself with reticence or good taste. But withal it had at that moment a kind of majesty, and there was majesty in the solitude in which it stood. It seemed to weigh upon the earth with too great a burden. It was impressive to reflect that it had stood for so many centuries and looked down impassively upon the smiling bend of the Irrawaddy. The birds were singing noisily in the trees; the crickets chirped and the frogs croaked, croaked, croaked. Somewhere a boy was whistling a melancholy tune on a rude pipe and in the compound the natives were chattering loudly. There is no silence in the East.

It was at this hour that the Czecho-Slovak returned to the circuit-house. He was very hot and dusty, tired but happy, for he had missed nothing. He was a mine of information. The night began gradually to enfold the pagoda and it looked now unsubstantial, as though it were built of lath and plaster, so that you would not have been surprised to see it at the Paris Exhibition housing a display of colonial produce. It was a strangely sophisticated building in that exquisitely rural scene. But the Czecho-Slovak told me when it was built and under what king, and then, gathering way, began to tell me something of the history of Pagan. He had a retentive memory. He marshalled his facts with precision and delivered them with the fluency of a lecturer delivering a lecture he has repeated too often. But I did not want to know the facts he gave me. What did it matter to me what kings reigned there, what battles they fought and what lands they conquered? I was content to see them as a low relief on a temple wall in a long procession, with their hieratic attitudes, seated on a throne and receiving gifts from the envoys of subjugated nations, or else, with a confusion of spears, in the hurry and skelter of chariots, in the turmoil of battle. I asked the Czecho-Slovak what he was going to do with all the information he had acquired.

"Do? Nothing," he replied. "I like facts. I want to know things. Whenever I go anywhere I read everything about it that has been written. I study its history, the fauna and flora, the manners and customs of the people, I make myself thoroughly acquainted with its art and literature. I could write a standard book on every country I have visited. I am a mine of information."

"That is just what I was saying to myself. But what is the good of information that means nothing to you? Information for its own sake is like a flight of steps that leads to a blank wall."

"I do not agree with you. Information for its own sake is like a pin you pick up and put in the lapel of your coat or the piece of string that you untie instead of cutting and put away in a drawer. You never know when it will be useful."

And to show me that he did not choose his metaphors at random the Czecho-Slovak turned up the bottom of his stingah-shifter (which has no lapel) and showed me four pins in a neat row.

VI

FROM Pagan, wishing to go to Mandalay, I took the steamer once more, and a couple of days before I arrived there, the boat tying up at a riverside village, I made up my mind to go ashore. The skipper told me that there was there a pleasant little club in which I had only to make myself at home; they were quite used to having strangers drop off like that from the steamer, and the secretary was a very decent chap; I might even get a game of bridge. I had nothing in the world to do, so I got into one of the bullock-carts that were waiting at the landing-stage and was driven to the club. There was a man sitting on the veranda and as I walked up he nodded to me and asked whether I would have a whisky and soda or a gin and bitters. The possibility that I would have nothing at all did not even occur to him. I chose the longer drink and sat down. He was a tall, thin, bronzed man, with a big moustache, and he wore khaki shorts and a khaki shirt. I never knew his name, but when we had been chatting a little while another man came in who told me he was the secretary, and he addressed my friend as George.

"Have you heard from your wife yet?" he asked him.

The other's eyes brightened.

"Yes; I had letters by this mail. She's having no end of a time."

"Did she tell you not to fret?"

George gave a little chuckle, but was I mistaken in thinking that there was in it the shadow of a sob?

"In point of fact she did. But that's easier said than done. Of course I know she wants a holiday, and I'm glad she should have it, but it's devilish hard on a chap." He turned to me. "You see, this is the first time I've ever been separated from my missus, and I'm like a lost dog without her."

"How long have you been married?"

"Five minutes."

The secretary of the club laughed.

"Don't be a fool, George. You've been married eight years."

After we had talked for a little, George, looking at his watch, said he must go and change his clothes for dinner and left us. The secretary watched him disappear into the night with a smile of not unkindly irony.

"We all ask him as much as we can now that he's alone," he told me. "He mopes so terribly since his wife went home."

"It must be very pleasant for her to know that her husband is as devoted to her as all that."

"Mabel is a remarkable woman."

He called the boy and ordered more drinks. In this hospitable place they did not ask you if you would have anything; they took it for granted. Then he settled himself in his long chair and lit a cheroot. He told me the story of George and Mabel.

They became engaged when he was home on leave, and when he returned to Burma it was arranged that she should join him in six months. But one difficulty cropped up after another; Mabel's father died, the war came, George was sent to a district unsuitable for a white woman; so that in the end it was seven years before she was able to start. He made all arrangements for the marriage, which was to take place on the day of her arrival, and went down to Rangoon to meet her. On the morning on which the ship was due he borrowed a motor-car and drove along to the dock. He paced the quay.

Then, suddenly, without warning, his nerve failed him. He had not seen Mabel for seven years. He had forgotten what she was like. She was a total stranger. He felt a terrible sinking in the pit of his stomach and his knees began to wobble. He couldn't go through with it. He must tell Mabel that he was very sorry, but he couldn't, he really couldn't marry her. But how could a man tell a girl a thing like that when she had been engaged to him for seven years and had come six thousand miles to marry him? He hadn't the nerve for that either. George was seized with the courage of despair. There was a boat at the quay on the very point of starting for Singapore; he wrote a hurried letter to Mabel, and without a stick of luggage, just in the clothes he stood up in, leaped on board.

The letter Mabel received ran somewhat as follows:

Dearest Mabel, I have been suddenly called away on business and do not know when I shall be back. I think it would be much wiser if you returned to England. My plans are very uncertain. Your loving George.

But when he arrived at Singapore he found a cable waiting for him:

Quite understand. Don't worry. Love. Mabel.

Terror made him quick-witted.

"By Jove, I believe she's following me," he said.

He telegraphed to the shipping-office at Rangoon and sure enough her name was on the passenger list of the ship that was now on its way to Singapore. There was not a moment to lose. He jumped on the train to Bangkok. But he was uneasy; she would have no difficulty in finding out that he had gone to Bangkok and it was just as simple for her to take the train as it had been for him. Fortunately there was a French tramp sailing next day for Saigon. He took it. At Saigon he would be safe; it would never occur to her that he had gone there; and if it did, surely by now she would have taken the hint. It is five days' journey from Bangkok to Saigon and the boat is dirty, cramped, and uncomfortable. He was glad to arrive and took a rickshaw to the hotel. He signed his name in the visitors' book and a telegram was immediately handed to him. It contained but two words: *Love. Mabel.* They were enough to make him break into a cold sweat.

"When is the next boat for Hong Kong?" he asked.

Now his flight grew serious. He sailed to Hong Kong, but dared not stay there; he went to Manila; Manila was ominous; he went on to Shanghai: Shanghai was nerve-racking; every time he went out of the hotel he expected to run straight into Mabel's arms; no, Shanghai would never do. The only thing was to go to Yokohama. At the Grand Hotel at Yokohama a cable awaited him:

So sorry to have missed you at Manila. Love. Mabel.

He scanned the shipping intelligence with a fevered brow. Where was she now? He doubled back to Shanghai. This time he went straight to the club and asked for a telegram. It was handed to him:

Arriving shortly. Love. Mabel.

No, no, he was not so easy to catch as all that. He had already made his plans. The Yangtze is a long river and the Yangtze was falling. He could just about catch the last steamer that could get up to Chungking and then no one could travel till the following spring except by junk. Such a journey was out of the question for a woman alone. He went to Hankow and from Hankow to Ichang, he changed boats here and from Ichang through the rapids went to Chungking. But he was desperate now, he was not going to take any risks: there was a place called Cheng-tu, the capital of Szechuan, and it was four hundred miles away. It could only be reached by road, and the road was infested with brigands. A man would be safe there.

George collected chair-bearers and coolies and set out. It was

with a sigh of relief that he saw at last the crenellated walls of the lonely Chinese city. From those walls at sunset you could see the snowy mountains of Tibet.

He could rest at last: Mabel would never find him there. The consul happened to be a friend of his and he stayed with him. He enjoyed the comfort of a luxurious house, he enjoyed his idleness after that strenuous escape across Asia, and above all he enjoyed his divine security. The weeks passed lazily one after the other.

One morning George and the consul were in the courtyard looking at some curios that a Chinese had brought for their inspection, when there was a loud knocking at the great door of the consulate. The doorman flung it open. A chair borne by four coolies entered, advanced, and was set down. Mabel stepped out. She was neat and cool and fresh. There was nothing in her appearance to suggest that she had just come in after a fortnight on the road. George was petrified. He was as pale as death. She went up to him.

"Hulloa, George, I was so afraid I'd missed you again."

"Hulloa, Mabel," he faltered.

He did not know what to say. He looked this way and that: she stood between him and the doorway. She looked at him with a smile in her blue eyes.

"You haven't altered at all," she said. "Men can go off so dreadfully in seven years and I was afraid you'd got fat and bald. I've been so nervous. It would have been terrible if after all these years I simply hadn't been able to bring myself to marry you after all."

She turned to George's host.

"Are you the consul?" she asked.

"I am."

"That's all right. I'm ready to marry him as soon as I've had a bath."

And she did.

VII

FIRST of all Mandalay is a name. For there are places whose names from some accident of history or happy association have an independent magic and perhaps the wise man would never visit them, for the expectations they arouse can hardly be realised. Names have a life of their own, and though Trebizond may be nothing but a poverty-stricken village the glamour of its name

must invest it for all right-thinking minds with the trappings of Empire; and Samarkand: can anyone write the word without a quickening of the pulse and at his heart the pain of unsatisfied desire? The very name of the Irrawaddy informs the sensitive fancy with its vast and turbid flow. The streets of Mandalay, dusty, crowded, and drenched with a garish sun, are broad and straight. Tram-cars lumber down them with a rout of passengers; they fill the seats and gangways and cling thickly to the footboard like flies clustered upon an over-ripe mango. The houses, with their balconies and verandas, have the slatternly look of the houses in the Main Street of a Western town that has fallen upon evil days. Here are no narrow alleys nor devious ways down which the imagination may wander in search of the unimaginable. It does not matter: Mandalay has its name; the falling cadence of the lovely word has gathered about itself the chiaroscuro of romance.

But Mandalay has also its fort. The fort is surrounded by a high wall, and the high wall by a moat. In the fort stands the palace, and stood, before they were torn down, the offices of King Thebaw's Government and the dwelling-places of his Ministers. At intervals in the wall are gateways washed white with lime and each is surmounted by a sort of belvedere, like a summer-house in a Chinese garden; and on the bastions are teak pavilions too fanciful to allow you to think they could ever have served a war-like purpose. The wall is made of huge sun-baked bricks and the colour of it is old rose. At its foot is a broad stretch of sward planted quite thickly with tamarind, cassia, and acacia; a flock of brown sheep, advancing with tenacity, slowly but intently grazes the luscious grass; and here in the evening you see the Burmese in their coloured skirts and bright headkerchiefs wander in twos and threes. They are little brown men of a solid and sturdy build, with something a trifle Mongolian in their faces. They walk deliberately as though they were owners and tillers of the soil. They have none of the sidelong grace, the deprecating elegance, of the Indian who passes them; they have not his refinement of features, nor his languorous, effeminate distinction. They smile easily. They are happy, cheerful, and amiable.

In the broad water of the moat the rosy wall and the thick foliage of the trees and the Burmese in their bright clothes are sharply reflected. The water is still, but not stagnant, and peace rests upon it like a swan with a golden crown. Its colours, in the early morning and towards sunset, have the soft fatigued tender-

ness of pastel; they have the translucency, without the stubborn definiteness, of oils. It is as though light were a prestidigitator and in play laid on colours that he had just created, and were about with a careless hand to wash them out again. You hold your breath, for you cannot believe that such an effect can be anything but evanescent. You watch it with the same expectancy with which you read a poem in some complicated metre when your ear awaits the long-delayed rhyme that will fulfil the harmony. But at sunset, when the clouds in the west are red and splendid so that the wall, the trees, and the moat are drenched in radiance; and at night under the full moon, when the white gateways drip with silver and the belvederes above them are shot with silhouetted glimpses of the sky, the assault on your senses is shattering. You try to guard yourself by saying it is not real. This is not a beauty that steals upon you unawares, that flatters and soothes your bruised spirit, this is not a beauty that you can hold in your hand and call your own and put in its place among familiar beauties that you know; it is a beauty that batters you and stuns you and leaves you breathless, there is no calmness in it nor control, it is like a fire that on a sudden consumes you and you are left shaken and bare and yet by a strange miracle alive.

VIII

THE palace of Mandalay is built within a great square, surrounded by a low whitewashed wall, and you go up to the terrace on which it stands by an inconsiderable stairway. In old days this expanse was thickly covered with buildings, but now many of them, the lodgings of inferior queens and of maids of honour, have been pulled down and where they stood are pleasant green spaces.

First, then, you come upon a long audience chamber, then a throne room, robing chambers, other throne rooms, and private apartments. On each side of these are the dwelling-places of the king, the queens, and the princesses. The throne room is a barn, a roof supported by tall posts, but the posts are great teak trees on which you can still see the marks of the tools with which they were rudely shaped, and they are lacquered and gilt; the walls are mere planks roughly planed and they are lacquered and gilt too. The gold is worn and discoloured. The contrast of this crudeness

of workmanship with all this gilt and lacquer gives, I know not how, an effect of peculiar magnificence. Each building, too much like a Swiss chalet, by itself is unimpressive, but in the mass they have a dark splendour that takes the fancy. The carving that adorns the roofs, the balustrades, and the partitions between chamber and chamber is coarse, but the designs have often grace and a luxurious elegance. The builders of the palace in the most unexpected way, by the use of the most incongruous elements, have achieved a palatial effect, so that you feel that here Oriental monarchs might fitly dwell. Much of the decoration is obtained by the use in various patterns of a mosaic of innumerable little pieces of mirror and of white and brightly-coloured glass: you would have said that nothing could be more hideous (it reminds you of the kind of thing you saw on Margate pier in your childhood and took back with pride after a day's outing as a present to a dismayed relation), yet oddly enough the impression is not only sumptuous but pleasing. So rudely carved are the screens and partitions on which these artful fragments of glass are thus inlaid that they have none of the effect of tinsel, but on their gold ground glitter dimly with the secret radiance of tarnished gems. This is not a barbarous art, which has a greater strength and vitality, a more rugged force, but a savage or if you like a child-like art; it is in a way trifling and effeminate and it is its roughness (as though with uncertain touch the artists were creating each familiar pattern afresh from their own heads) that gives it character. You have a notion of a people fumbling confusedly with the very beginning of the beautiful and they are charmed with shining objects as a bushman might be or a child.

The palace now is despoiled of the rich hangings and the gilded furniture with which it was adorned. You walk through chamber after chamber and it is like a house that has been long to let. No one seems to visit it. Towards evening these gilded, jewelled, deserted chambers are sombre and ghostly. You wander softly so that you may not disturb the faintly scented silence. You stand and look at all that emptiness in amaze and it is incredible that so short a while ago this was the scene of unimaginable intrigue and of turbulent passion. For here romance is within the memory of men still alive. It is not fifty years since this palace saw incidents as dramatic and to us as remote as those of the Renaissance in Italy or of Byzantium. I was taken to see an old lady who in her day had made history. She was a rather stout, short person,

dressed soberly in black and white, and she looked at me through gold-rimmed spectacles with quiet, slightly ironic eyes. Her father, a Greek, had been in the service of King Mindon and she was appointed maid of honour to Queen Supalayay. Presently she married the English captain of one of the King's river boats, but he died, and after a decent interval she became engaged to a Frenchman. (She spoke in a low voice, with the very faintest trace of a foreign accent; the flies buzzing about her did not seem to incommode her, she held her hands clasped demurely on her lap.) The Frenchman went home and at Marseilles married one of his own countrywomen. After so long a time she did not remember very much about him; she remembered his name, of course, and she remembered that he had a very handsome moustache, and that was all. But then she loved him madly. (When she laughed it was a little ghostly chuckle as though her mirth were a shadow and what she laughed at an illusion of the comic.) She made up her mind to be revenged on him. She still had her entrée to the palace. She got hold of the draft of a treaty that King Thebaw had made with the French by the terms of which every sphere of influence in Upper Burma passed into their hands. She gave it to the Italian consul to take to the Chief Commissioner of Lower Burma, and so caused the English advance on Mandalay and the dethronement and exile of King Thebaw. Was it not Alexandre Dumas who said that in the theatre there is nothing so dramatic as something that is happening behind a closed door? The quiet, ironic eyes of that old lady, behind their gold-rimmed spectacles, were a closed door, and who could tell what bizarre thoughts, what a welter of fantastic passions, still dwelt behind them? She spoke of Queen Supalayay: she was a very nice woman, and people had been so unkind about her; all those stories of the massacres she had instigated, stuff and nonsense!

"I know for a fact that she did not murder more than two or three people at the outside." The old lady faintly shrugged her fat little shoulders. "Two or three people! What is that to make a fuss about? Life is cheap."

I sipped a cup of tea and someone turned on the gramophone.

IX

THOUGH not an indomitable sight-seer I went to Amarapura, once the capital of Burma, but now a straggling village, where the tamarind trees grow lofty on each side of the road and in their shade the silk-weavers ply their trade. The tamarind is a noble tree. Its trunk is rough and gnarled, pale like the teak logs that have been floating down the river, and its roots are like great serpents that writhe upon the earth with a convulsive violence; but its foliage is lacy and fern-like, so thick that notwithstanding the delicacy of the leaves it yields a dense shade. It is like an old farmer's wife, full of years, but rugged and hale, who is clothed incongruously in fleecy muslins. Green pigeons roost in its branches. Men and women sit outside their little houses, spinning or winding the silk on bobbins, and they have soft, friendly eyes. Children play about them and pariah dogs lie sleeping in the middle of the road. It is a gently industrious, happy, and peaceful life that they seem to lead, and the thought crosses your mind that here are people who have found at least one solution to the mystery of existence.

Then I went to see the great bell at Mengon. Here is a Buddhist convent and as I stood looking a group of nuns surrounded me. They wore robes of the same shape and size as the monks' but, instead of the monks' fine yellow, of a grimy dun. Little old toothless women, their heads shaven but covered with an inch of thin grey stubble, and their little old faces deeply lined and wrinkled. They held out skinny hands for money and gabbled with bare, pale gums. Their dark eyes were alert with covetousness and their smiles were mischievous. They were very old and they had no human ties or affections. They seemed to look upon the world with a humorous cynicism. They had lived through every kind of illusion and held existence in a malicious and laughing contempt. They had no tolerance for the follies of men and no indulgence for their weakness. There was something vaguely frightening in their entire lack of attachment to human things. They had done with love, they had finished with the anguish of separation, death had no terrors for them, they had nothing left now but laughter. They struck the great bell so that I might hear its tone; boom, boom, it went, a long, low note that travelled in slow reverberations down the river, a solemn sound that seemed to call the soul from its

tenement of clay and reminded it that though all created things were illusion, in the illusion was also beauty; and the nuns, following the sound, burst into ribald cackles of laughter, hi, hi, hi, that mocked the call of the great bell. Dupes, their laughter said, dupes and fools. Laughter is the only reality.

X

WHEN I left Colombo I had no notion of going to Keng Tung, but on the ship I met a man who told me he had spent five years there. He said it had an important market, held every five days, whither came natives of half a dozen countries and members of half a hundred tribes. It had pagodas darkly splendid and a remoteness that liberated the questing spirit from its anxiety. He said he would sooner live there than anywhere in the world. I asked him what it had offered him and he said, contentment. He was a tall, dark fellow with the aloofness of manner you often find in those who have lived much alone in unfrequented places. Men like this are a little restless in the company of others and though in the smoking-room of a ship or at the club bar they may be talkative and convivial, telling their story with the rest, joking and glad sometimes to narrate their unusual experiences, they seem always to hold something back. They have a life in themselves that they keep apart, and there as a look in their eyes, as it were turned inwards, that informs you that this hidden life is the only one that signifies to them. And now and then their eyes betray their weariness with the social round into which hazard or the fear of seeming odd has for a moment forced them. They seem then to long for the monotonous solitude of some place of their predilection where they can be once more alone with the reality they have found.

It was as much the manner of this chance acquaintance as what he told me that persuaded me to make the journey across the Shan States on which I now set out. From the railhead in Upper Burma to the railhead in Siam, whence I could get down to Bangkok, it was between six and seven hundred miles. Kind people had done everything possible to render the excursion easy for me and the Resident at Taunggyi had wired to me that he had made arrangements for mules and ponies to be ready for me on my arrival. I had bought in Rangoon such stores as seemed

necessary, folding chairs and a table, a filter, lamps, and I know not what. I took the train from Mandalay to Thazi, intending there to hire a car for Taunggyi, and a man I had met at the club at Mandalay and who lived at Thazi asked me to have brunch (the pleasant meal of Burma that combines breakfast and lunch) with him before I started. His name was Masterson. He was a man in the early thirties, with a pleasant, friendly face, curling dark hair speckled with grey, and handsome dark eyes. He spoke with a singularly musical voice, very slowly, and this, I hardly know why, inspired you with confidence. You felt that a man who took such a long time to say what he had to say and had found the world with sufficient leisure to listen to him must have qualities that made him sympathetic to his fellows. He took the amiability of mankind for granted and I suppose he could only have done this because he was himself amiable. He had a nice sense of humour, without of course a quick thrust and parry, but agreeably sarcastic; it was of that agreeable type that applies common sense to the accidents of life and so sees them in a faintly ridiculous aspect. He was engaged in a business that kept him travelling up and down Burma most of the year and in his journeyings he had acquired the collector's habit. He told me that he spent all his spare money on buying Burmese curiosities and it was especially to see them that he asked me to have a meal with him.

The train got in early in the morning. He had warned me that, having to be at his office, he could not meet me; but brunch was at ten and he told me to go to his house as soon as I was finished with the one or two things I had to do in the town.

"Make yourself at home," he said, "and if you want a drink ask the boy for it. I'll get back as soon as I've got through with my business."

I found out where there was a garage and made a bargain with the owner of a very dilapidated Ford to take me and my baggage to Taunggyi. I left my Madrassi servant to see that everything was stowed in it that was possible and the rest tied on to the footboards, and strolled along to Masterson's house. It was a neat little bungalow in a road shaded by tall trees, and in the early light of a sunny day looked pretty and home-like. I walked up the steps and was hailed by Masterson.

"I got done more quickly than I expected. I shall have time to show you my things before brunch is ready. What will you have? I'm afraid I can only offer you a whisky and soda."

"Isn't it rather early for that?"

"Rather. But it's one of the rules of the house that nobody crosses the threshold without having a drink."

"What can I do but submit to the rule?"

He called the boy and in a moment a trim Burmese brought in a decanter, a syphon, and glasses. I sat down and looked about the room. Though it was still so early the sun was hot outside and the jalousies were drawn. The light was pleasant and cool after the glare of the road. The room was comfortably furnished with rattan chairs and on the walls were water-colour paintings of English scenes. They were a little prim and old-fashioned and I guessed that they had been painted in her youth by the maiden and elderly aunt of my host. There were two of a cathedral I did not know, two or three of a rose garden and one of a Georgian house. When he saw my eyes for an instant rest upon this, he said:

"That was our house at Cheltenham."

"Oh, is that where you come from?"

Then there was his collection. The room was crowded with Buddhas and with figures, in bronze or wood, of the Buddha's disciples; there were boxes of all shapes, utensils of one kind and another, curiosities of every sort, and although there were far too many they were arranged with a certain taste so that the effect was pleasing. He had some lovely things. He showed them to me with pride, telling me how he had got this object and that, and how he had heard of another and hunted it down and the incredible astuteness he had employed to induce an unwilling owner to part with it. His kindly eyes shone when he described a great bargain and they flashed darkly when he inveighed against the unreasonableness of a vendor who rather than accept a fair price for a bronze dish had taken it away. There were flowers in the room, and it had not the forlorn look that so many bachelors' houses have in the East.

"You've made the place very comfortable," I said.

He gave the room a sweeping glance.

"It was all right. It's not much now."

I did not quite know what he meant. Then he showed me a long wooden gilt box, decorated with the glass mosaics that I had admired in the palace at Mandalay, but the workmanship was more delicate than anything I had seen there, and this with its gem-like richness had really something of the ornate exquisiteness of the Italian Renaissance.

"They tell me it's about a couple of hundred years old," he said. "They've not been able to turn out anything like this for a long time."

It was a piece made obviously for a king's palace and you wondered to what uses it had been put and what hands it had passed through. It was a jewel.

"What is the inside like?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing much. It's just lacquered."

He opened it and I saw that it contained three or four framed photographs.

"Oh, I'd forgotten those were there," he said.

His soft, musical voice had a queer sound in it, and I gave him a sidelong look. He was bronzed by the sun, but his face notwithstanding flushed a deeper red. He was about to close the box, and then he changed his mind. He took out one of the photographs and showed it to me.

"Some of these Burmese girls are rather sweet when they're young, aren't they?" he said.

The photograph showed a young girl standing somewhat self-consciously against the conventional background of a photographer's studio, a pagoda and a group of palm trees. She was wearing her best clothes and she had a flower in her hair. But the embarrassment you saw she felt at having her picture taken did not prevent a shy smile from trembling on her lips and her large solemn eyes had nevertheless a roguish twinkle. She was very small and very slender.

"What a ravishing little thing," I said.

Then Masterson took out another photograph in which she sat with a child standing by her side, his hand timidly on her knee, and a baby in her arms. The child stared straight in front of him with a look of terror on his face; he could not understand what that machine and the man behind it, his head under a black cloth, were up to.

"Are those her children?" I asked.

"And mine," said Masterson.

At that moment the boy came in to say that brunch was ready. We went into the dining-room and sat down.

"I don't know what you'll get to eat. Since my girl went away everything in the house has gone to blazes."

A sulky look came into his red, honest face and I did not know what to reply.

"I'm so hungry that whatever I get will seem good," I hazarded.

He did not say anything and a plate of thin porridge was put before us. I helped myself to milk and sugar. Masterson ate a spoonful or two and pushed his plate aside.

"I wish I hadn't looked at those damned photographs," he said. "I put them away on purpose."

I did not want to be inquisitive or to force a confidence my host had no wish to give, but neither did I desire to seem so unconcerned as to prevent him from telling me something he had in his heart. Often in some lonely post in the jungle or in a stiff, grand house, solitary in the midst of a teeming Chinese city, a man has told me stories about himself that I was sure he had never told to a living soul. I was a stray acquaintance whom he had never seen before and would never see again, a wanderer for a moment through his monotonous life, and some starved impulse led him to lay bare his soul. I have in this way learned more about men in a night (sitting over a syphon or two and a bottle of whisky, the hostile, inexplicable world outside the radius of an acetylene lamp) than I could have if I had known them for ten years. If you are interested in human nature it is one of the great pleasures of travel. And when you separate (for you have to be up betimes) sometimes they will say to you:

"I'm afraid I've bored you to death with all this nonsense. I haven't talked so much for six months. But it's done me good to get it off my chest."

The boy removed the porridge plates and gave each of us a piece of pale fried fish. It was rather cold.

"The fish is beastly, isn't it?" said Masterson. "I hate river fish, except trout; the only thing is to smother it with Worcester sauce."

He helped himself freely and passed me the bottle.

"She was a damned good housekeeper, my girl; I used to feed like a fighting-cock when she was here. She'd have had the cook out of the house in a quarter of an hour if he'd sent in muck like this."

He gave me a smile, and I noticed that his smile was very sweet. It gave him a peculiarly gentle look.

"It was rather a wrench parting with her, you know."

It was quite evident now that he wished to talk and I had no hesitation in giving him a lead.

"Did you have a row?"

"No. You could hardly call it a row. She lived with me five

years and we never had a tiff even. She was the best-tempered little thing that ever was. Nothing seemed to put her out. She was always as merry as a cricket. You couldn't look at her without her lips breaking into a smile. She was always happy. And there was no reason why she shouldn't be. I was very good to her."

"I'm sure you were," I answered.

"She was mistress here. I gave her everything she wanted. Perhaps if I'd been more of a brute she wouldn't have gone away."

"Don't make me say anything so obvious as that women are incalculable."

He gave me a deprecating glance and there was a trace of shyness in the smile that just flickered in his eyes.

"Would it bore you awfully if I told you about it?"

"Of course not."

"Well, I saw her one day in the street and she rather took my fancy. I showed you her photograph, but the photograph doesn't begin to do her justice. It sounds silly to say about a Burmese girl, but she was like a rose-bud, not an English rose, you know, she was as little like that as the glass flowers on that box I showed you are like real flowers, but a rose grown in an Eastern garden that had something strange and exotic about it. I don't know how to make myself plain."

"I think I understand what you mean all the same," I smiled.

"I saw her two or three times and found out where she lived. I sent my boy to make inquiries about her, and he told me that her parents were quite willing that I should have her if we could come to an arrangement. I wasn't inclined to haggle and everything was settled in no time. Her family gave a party to celebrate the occasion and she came to live here. Of course I treated her in every way as my wife and put her in charge of the house. I told the boys that they'd got to take their orders from her and if she complained of any of them out they went. You know, some fellows keep their girls in the servants' quarters and when they go away on tour the girls have a rotten time. Well, I think that's a filthy thing to do. If you are going to have a girl to live with you the least you can do is to see that she has a good time.

"She was a great success and I was as pleased as Punch. She kept the house spotless. She saved me money. She wouldn't let the boys rob me. I taught her to play bridge and, believe me, she learned to play a damned good game."

"Did she like it?"

"Loved it. When people came here she couldn't have received them better if she'd been a duchess. You know, these Burmese have beautiful manners. Sometimes it would make me laugh to see the assurance with which she would receive my guests, Government officials, you know, and soldiers who were passing through. If some young subaltern was rather shy she'd put him at his ease at once. She was never pushing or obtrusive, but just there when she was wanted and doing her best to see that everything went well and everyone had a good time. And I'll tell you what, she could mix the best cocktail you'd get anywhere between Rangoon and Bhamo. People used to say I was lucky."

"I'm bound to say I think you were," I said.

The curry was served and I piled my plate with rice and helped myself to chicken and then chose from a dozen little dishes the condiments I fancied. It was a good curry.

"Then she had her babies, three in three years, but one died when it was six weeks old. I showed you a photograph of the two that are living. Funny-looking little things, aren't they? Are you fond of children?"

"Yes. I have a strange and almost unnatural passion for newborn babies."

"I don't think I am, you know. I couldn't even feel very much about my own. I've often wondered if it showed that I was rather a rotter."

"I don't think so. I think the passion many people affect for children is merely a fashionable pose. I have a notion that children are all the better for not being burdened with too much parental love."

"Then my girl asked me to marry her, legally I mean, in the English way. I treated it as a joke. I didn't know how she'd got such an idea in her head. I thought it was only a whim and I gave her a gold bracelet to keep her quiet. But it wasn't a whim. She was quite serious about it. I told her there was nothing doing. But you know what women are, when they once set their mind on getting something they never give you a moment's peace. She wheedled and sulked, she cried, she appealed to my compassion, she tried to extract a promise out of me when I was rather tight, she was on the watch for me when I was feeling amorous, she nearly tripped me when she was ill. She watched me more carefully, I should think, than a stockbroker ever watched the market,

and I knew that, however natural she seemed, however occupied with something else, she was always warily alert for the unguarded moment when she could pounce on me and gain her point."

Masterson gave me once more his slow, ingenuous smile.

"I suppose women are pretty much the same all the world over," he said.

"I expect so," I answered.

"A thing I've never been able to understand is why a woman thinks it worth while to make you do something you don't want to. She'd rather you did a thing against the grain than not do it at all. I don't see what satisfaction it can be to them."

"The satisfaction of triumph. A man convinced against his will may be of the same opinion still, but a woman doesn't mind that. She has conquered. She has proved her power."

Masterson shrugged his shoulders. He drank a cup of tea.

"You see, she said that sooner or later I was bound to marry an English girl and turn her out. I said I wasn't thinking of marrying. She said she knew all about that. And even if I didn't I should retire some day and go back to England. And where would she be then? It went on for a year. I held out. Then she said that if I wouldn't marry her she'd go, and take the kids with her. I told her not to be a silly little fool. She said that if she left me now she could marry a Burman, but in a few years nobody would want her. She began to pack her things. I thought it was only a bluff and I called it: I said, 'Well, go if you want to, but if you do you won't come back.' I didn't think she'd give up a house like this, and the presents I made her, and all the pickings, to go back to her own family. They were as poor as church mice. Well, she went on packing her things. She was just as nice as ever to me, she was gay and smiling; when some fellows came to spend the night here she was just as cordial as usual, and she played bridge with us till two in the morning. I couldn't believe she meant to go and yet I was rather scared. I was very fond of her. She was a damned good sort."

"But if you were fond of her why on earth didn't you marry her? It had been a great success."

"I'll tell you. If I married her I'd have to stay in Burma for the rest of my life. Sooner or later I shall retire and then I want to go back to my old home and live there. I don't want to be buried out here, I want to be buried in an English churchyard. I'm happy enough here, but I don't want to live here always. I couldn't. I

want England. Sometimes I get sick of this hot sunshine and these garish colours. I want grey skies and a soft rain falling and the smell of the country. I shall be a funny, fat, elderly man when I go back, too old to hunt even if I could afford it, but I can fish. I don't want to shoot tigers, I want to shoot rabbits. And I can play golf on a proper course. I know I shall be out of it, we fellows who've spent our lives out here always are, but I can potter about the local club and talk to retired Anglo-Indians. I want to feel under my feet the grey pavement of an English country town, I want to be able to go and have a row with the butcher because the steak he sent me in yesterday was tough, and I want to browse about second-hand bookshops. I want to be said how d'you do to in the street by people who knew me when I was a boy. And I want to have a walled garden at the back of my house and grow roses. I dare say it all sounds very humdrum and provincial and dull to you, but that's the sort of life my people have always lived and that's the sort of life I want to live myself. It's a dream if you like, but it's all I have, it means everything in the world to me, and I can't give it up."

He paused for a moment and looked into my eyes.

"Do you think me an awful fool?"

"No."

"Then one morning she came to me and said that she was off. She had her things put on a cart and even then I didn't think she meant it. Then she put the two children in a rickshaw and came to say good-bye to me. She began to cry. By George, that pretty well broke me up. I asked her if she really meant to go and she said yes, unless I married her. I shook my head. I very nearly yielded. I'm afraid I was crying too. Then she gave a great sob and ran out of the house. I had to drink about half a tumbler of whisky to steady my nerves."

"How long ago did this happen?"

"Four months. At first I thought she'd come back, and then because I thought she was ashamed to make the first step I sent my boy to tell her that if she wanted to come I'd take her. But she refused. The house seemed awfully empty without her. At first I thought I'd get used to it, but somehow it doesn't seem to get any less empty. I didn't know how much she meant to me. She'd twined herself round my heart."

"I suppose she'll come back if you agree to marry her."

"Oh yes, she told the boy that. Sometimes I ask myself if it's

worth while to sacrifice my happiness for a dream. It is only a dream, isn't it? It's funny, one of the things that holds me back is the thought of a muddy lane I know, with great clay banks on both sides of it, and, above, beech trees bending over. It's got a sort of cold, earthy smell that I can never quite get out of my nostrils. I don't blame her, you know. I rather admire her. I had no idea she had so much character. Sometimes I'm awfully inclined to give way." He hesitated for a little while. "I think, perhaps, if I thought she loved me I would. But, of course, she doesn't; they never do, these girls who go and live with white men; I think she liked me, but that's all. What would you do in my place?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, how can I tell? Would you ever forget the dream?"

"Never."

At that moment the boy came in to say that my Madrassi servant with the Ford car had just come up. Masterson looked at his watch.

"You'll want to be getting off, won't you? And I must get back to my office. I'm afraid I've rather bored you with my domestic affairs."

"Not at all," I said.

We shook hands, I put on my topeo, and he waved to me as the car drove off.

XI

I SPENT a few days at Taunggyi completing my preparations and then, early one morning, started. It was the end of the rainy season and the sky was overcast, but the clouds were high in the heavens and bright. The country was wide and open, sparsely covered with little trees; but now and then, a giant among them, you came upon a huge banyan with wide-spreading roots. It stood upon the earth, a fit object for worship, with a kind of solemnity, as though it were conscious of victory over the blind force of nature and now, like a great power aware of its enemy's strength, rested in armed peace. At its foot were the offerings that the Shans had placed to the spirit that dwelt in it. The road wound tortuously up and down gentle declivities and on each side of it, stretching over the upland plains, swayed the elephant grass. Its

white fronds waved softly in the balmy air. It was higher than a man and I rode between it like the leader of an army reviewing countless regiments of tall green soldiers.

I rode at the head of the caravan, and the mules and ponies that carried the loads followed at my heels. But one of the ponies, unused perhaps to a pack, was very wild. It had savage eyes. Every now and then it bolted wildly among the mules, hitting them with its packs; then the leading mule headed it off, rounding it in to the long grass at the side of the road, and stopped it. They both stood still for a moment and then the mule led the pony quietly back to its place in the file. It walked along quite contentedly. It had had its scamper and for a little while at all events was prepared to behave reasonably. The idea in the mulish brain of the pack-leader was as clear and distinct as any idea of Descartes. In the train was peace, order, and happiness. To walk with your nose at the tail of the mule in front of you, and to know that the nose of the mule behind you was at your tail, was virtue. Like some philosophers the mule knew that the only liberty was the power to do right; any other power was only licence. Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.

But presently I came face to face with a buffalo standing stock-still in the middle of the road. Now, I knew that the Shan buffalo had none of that dislike of my colour that makes white men give the Chinese buffalo a wide berth, but I was not certain whether this particular animal had a very exact notion of nationality, and since his horns were enormous and his eyes far from friendly I thought it prudent to make a slight detour: whereupon the whole file, though neither mules nor muleteers could have had my reason for anxiety, followed me into the elephant grass. I could not but reflect that an undue observance of the law may put you to a good deal of unnecessary trouble.

With abundant leisure before me and nothing to distract, I had promised myself to think out on this journey various things that had been on my mind for a long time. There were a number of subjects, error and evil, space, time, chance and mutability, which I felt I should really come to some conclusion about. I had a great deal to say to myself about art and life, but my ideas were higgledy-piggledy like the objects in an old junk shop and I did not know where to put my hands on them when I wanted them. They were in corners of my mind, like oddments stowed away at the back of a chest of drawers, and I only just knew they were

there. Some of them hadn't been taken out and brushed for so long that it was a disgrace, the new and the old were all jumbled together, and some were of no use any more and might just as well be thrown on the dust heap, and some (like a pair of Queen Anne spoons long forgotten that with the four a dealer has just found you in an auction-room make up the half-dozen) would fit very well with new ones. It would be pleasant to have everything cleaned and dusted, neatly put away on shelves, ordered and catalogued so that I knew what my stock consisted of. I resolved that while I rode through the country I would have a regular spring-cleaning of all my ideas. But the pack-leader had round his neck a raucous bell and it clanged so loudly that my reflections were very much disturbed. It was like a muffin bell and it made me think of Sunday afternoon in the London of my youth, with its empty streets and its grey, cold, and melancholy sky. I put the spurs to my pony so that I might trot on and escape the dreary sound, but as soon as I began to do so the leader trotted too and the whole cavalcade trotted after him; I galloped and in a moment mules and ponies, their packs jangling and bumping, were galloping helter-skelter after me, and the muffin bell rattled madly at my heels as though it were knelling the death agonies of all the muffin-makers in London. I gave it up as a bad job and settled down again to walk; the train slowed down and just behind me the pack-leader shuffled up and down the empty, respectable street offering muffins for tea, muffins and crumpets. I could not put two thoughts together. I resigned myself at least for that day to make no attempt at serious meditation and instead, to pass the time, invented Blenkinsop.

There can be nothing so gratifying to an author as to arouse the respect and esteem of the reader. Make him laugh and he will think you a trivial fellow, but bore him in the right way and your reputation is assured. There was once a man called Blenkinsop. He had no talent, but he wrote a book in which his earnestness and his sincerity, his thoughtfulness and his integrity, were so evident that, although it was quite unreadable, no one could fail to be impressed by it. Reviewers were unable to get through it, but could not but recognise the author's high aim and purity of purpose. They praised it with such an enthusiastic unanimity that all the people who flatter themselves they are in the movement felt bound to have it on their tables. The critic of *The London Mercury* said that he would have liked to have written it himself.

This was the highest praise he knew. Mr. Blenkinsop deplored the grammar but accepted the compliment. Mrs. Woolf paid it a generous tribute at Bloomsbury, Mr. Osbert Sitwell admired it in Chelsea, and Mr. Arnold Bennett was judicious about it in Cadogan Square. Smart women of easy morals bought it so that people should not think they had no mind above the Embassy Club and banting. The poets who go to luncheon parties talked of it exactly as though they had read it from cover to cover. It was bought in the great provincial towns where the virtuous young are gathered together at high tea to improve their minds. Mr. Hugh Walpole wrote a preface to the American edition. The booksellers placed it in piles in their shop windows with a photograph of the author on one side and a card with long extracts from the more important reviews on the other. In short the vogue of the book was so great that its publisher said that if it did not stop selling soon he would have to read it himself. Mr. Blenkinsop became a celebrity. He was asked to its annual dinner by the Lyceum Club.

Now it happened that just about the time when Mr. Blenkinsop's book reached this dizzy height of success, the Prime Minister's secretary presented the Prime Minister with the list of Birthday Honours. This high dignitary of the Crown looked at it with misgiving.

"A pretty mangy lot," he said. "The public will raise a stink about this."

The secretary was a democrat.

"Who cares?" he said. "Let the public go and boil itself."

"Couldn't we do something for arts and letters?" suggested the Prime Minister.

The secretary remarked that almost all the R.A.s were knights already and those that were kicked up the devil of a row if any others were knighted.

"The more the merrier, I should have thought," said the Prime Minister flippantly.

"Not at all," answered the secretary. "The more titled R.A.s there are the less is their financial value."

"I see," said the Prime Minister. "But are there no authors in England?"

"I will inquire," replied the secretary, who had been at Balliol.

He asked at the National Liberal Club and was told that there were Sir Hall Caine and Sir James Barrie. But honours had already been heaped upon them so freely that there seemed nothing more

to offer them than the Garter and it was evident that the Lord Mayor of London would be very much put out if they were offered that. The Prime Minister was, however, insistent and his secretary was in a quandary. But one day when he was being shaved his barber asked him if he had read Blenkinsop's book.

"I'm not much of a reader meself," he said, "but our Miss Burroughs, she done your nails last time you was here, sir, she says it's simply divine."

The Prime Minister's secretary was a man who made it his business to be abreast of the current movements in art and literature, and he was well aware that Blenkinsop's book was a sound piece of work. In honouring him the State would honour itself and the public might swallow without a wry face the baronetcies and peerages that rewarded services of a less obvious character. But he could afford to take no risks and so sent for the manicurist.

"Have you read it?" he asked her point-blank.

"No, sir, I haven't exactly what you might call read it, but all the gentlemen who talk about it when I'm doing their nails say it's absolutely priceless."

The result of this conversation was that the secretary placed Blenkinsop's name before the Prime Minister and told him of his book.

"What do you think about it yourself?" asked the great man.

"I haven't read it, I don't read books," replied the secretary frigidly, "but there's nothing about it that I don't know."

Blenkinsop was offered a K.C.V.O.

"We may just as well do the thing well if we're going to do it at all," said the Prime Minister.

But Blenkinsop, true to his character, begged to be allowed to refuse the distinction. Here was a pretty kettle of fish! The Prime Minister was a man of determination. When he had once made up his mind to do a thing he would allow no obstacle to stand in his way. He discovered the solution in a flash of his fertile brain and literature after all found a place in the Birthday Honours. A viscounty was conferred on the Editor of Bradshaw's Railway Time Tables.

XII

BUT even when I had learned by experience that if I wanted a quiet ride I must give the mules an hour's start of me I found it impossible to concentrate my thoughts on any of the subjects that I had selected for meditation. Though nothing of the least consequence happened, my attention was distracted by a hundred trifling incidents of the wayside. Two big butterflies in black and white fluttered along in front of me, and they were like young war widows bearing the loss they had sustained for their country's sake with cheerful resignation: so long as there were dances at Claridge's and dressmakers in the Place Vendôme they were ready to swear that all was well with the world. A little cheeky bird hopped down the road, turning round every now and then jauntily as though to call my attention to her smart suit of silver-grey. She looked like a neat typist tripping along from the station to her office in Cheapside. A swarm of saffron butterflies upon the droppings of an ass reminded me of pretty girls in evening frocks hovering round an obese financier. At the roadside grew a flower that was like the sweet william that I remember in the cottage gardens of my childhood and another had the look of a more leggy white heather. I wish, as many writers do, I could give distinction to these pages by the enumeration of the birds and flowers that I saw as I ambled along on my little Shan pony. It has a scientific air and though the reader skips the passage it gives him a slight thrill of self-esteem to know that he is reading a book with solid fact in it. It puts you on strangely familiar terms with your reader when you tell him that you came across P. Johnsonii. It has a significance that is almost cabalistic; you and he (writer and reader) share a knowledge that is not common to all and sundry and there is the sympathy between you that there is between men who wear masonic aprons or Old Etonian ties. You communicate with one another in a secret language. I should be proud to read in a footnote of a learned work on the botany or ornithology of Upper Burma, Maugham, however, states that he observed *F. Jonesia* in the Southern Shan States. But I know nothing of botany and ornithology. I could, indeed, fill a page with the names of all the sciences of which I am completely ignorant. A yellow primrose to me, alas! is not *primula Vulgaris*, but just a small yellow flower, ever so faintly scented with the rain, and grey balmy mornings in

February when you have a funny little flutter in your heart, and the smell of the rich wet Kentish earth, and kind dead faces, and the statue of Lord Beaconsfield in his bronze robes in Parliament Square, and the yellow hair of a girl with a sweet smile, hair now grey and shingled.

I passed a party of Shans cooking their dinner under a tree. Their wagons were placed in a circle round them, making a kind of laager, and the bullocks were grazing a little way off. I went on a mile or two and came upon a respectable Burman sitting at the side of the road and smoking a cheroot. Round him were his servants, with their loads on the ground beside them, for he had no muler and they were carrying his luggage themselves. They had made a little fire of sticks and were cooking the rice for his midday meal. I stopped while my interpreter had a chat with the respectable Burman. He was a clerk from Keng Tung on his way to Taunggyi to look for a situation in a Government office. He had been on the road for eighteen days and with only four more to go looked upon his journey as nearly at an end. Then a Shan on horseback threw confusion among the thoughts I tried to marshal. He rode a shaggy pony and his feet were bare in his stirrups. He wore a white jacket and his coloured skirt was tucked up so that it looked like gay riding breeches. He had a yellow handkerchief bound round his head. He was a romantic figure cantering through that wide upland, but not so romantic as Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* who rides through space and time with so gallant a bearing. No living horseman has ever achieved that effect of mystery so that when you look at him you feel that you stand on the threshold of an unknown that lures you on and yet closes the way for you. Nor is it strange, for nature and the beauty of nature are dead and senseless things and it is only art that can give them significance.

But with so much to distract me I could not but suspect that I should reach my journey's end without after all having made up my mind upon a single one of the important subjects that I had promised myself to consider.

XIII

THE day's march was no more than from twelve to fifteen miles, that being the distance that a mule can comfortably do,

and the distance from one another at which the P.W.D. bungalows are placed. But because it is the daily routine it gives you just as much the sensation of covering space as if you had been all day in an express train. When you arrive at your destination you are in reality just as far from your starting place, though you have gone but a few miles, as if you had travelled from Paris to Madrid. When you have ridden along a stream for a couple of days it seems to you of quite imposing length; you ask its name and are surprised to find that it has none, until you stop to reflect that you have followed it for no more than five and twenty miles. And the differences between the upland that you rode through yesterday and the jungle that you are riding through to-day impress themselves upon you as much as the differences between one country and another.

But because the bungalows are all built on the same pattern, though you have been riding for several hours (your caravan does little more than two miles an hour) you seem always to arrive at the same house. It stands on piles in a compound a few yards away from the road. There is a large living-room and, behind, two bedrooms with their bathrooms. In the middle of the living-room is a handsome teak table. There are two easy-chairs with extension for the legs and four stout, severe arm-chairs to set round the table. There is a chiffonier on which are copies of the *Strand Magazine* for 1918 and two tattered, much-read novels by Phillips Oppenheim. On the walls there is a longitudinal section of the road, a summary of the Burma Game Rules and a list of the furniture and the household utensils of the bungalow. In the compound are the servants' quarters, stalls for the ponies, and a cook-house. It is certainly not very pretty, it is not very comfortable, but it is solid, substantial, and serviceable; and though I had never seen any one bungalow before, and after that day should never see it again, I seldom caught sight of it at the end of the morning's journey without a little thrill of content. It was like coming home and when I got my first glimpse of its trim roof I put the spurs to my pony and galloped helter-skelter to the door.

The bungalow stands generally on the outskirts of a village, and when I arrived at the confines of the commune I found waiting to greet me the headman with his clerk and an attendant, a son or nephew, and the elders. When I approached they went down on their haunches, shikoed, and offered me a cup of water, a few marigolds, and a little rice. I drank the water with misgiving. But

once I was handed on a tray eight thin tapers and was told that this was the highest mark of respect that could be shown me, for they were the tapers that were set before the image of Buddha. I could not but be conscious that I little deserved such a compliment. I settled down in the bungalow and then my interpreter informed me that the headman and the elders stood without, desiring to tender the customary presents. They brought them in on lacquer trays: eggs, rice, and bananas. I sat down in a chair and they knelt on the floor in a half-circle in front of me. The headman, with abundant gestures but with composure, made me a long harangue. Through the translation that my interpreter gave me I thought I perceived certain phrases that were not unfamiliar to me, and I seemed to discern something about one flag, hands across the sea, and the desire that I should take back to my own country not only a greeting from this distant land, but the urgent request of the inhabitants that the Government would build a metal road. I felt it became me to make a reply if not as eloquent at least as long. I was only a wandering stranger, and if by the instructions they had received to make easy my way they had been misled into thinking me a person of any consequence I could at least do myself the justice of not behaving like one. I am no politician and I was too shamefaced to utter the imperial platitudes that fall so trippingly from the mouth of those who make it their business to govern empires. Perhaps I might have told my listeners that they were fortunate in being under the control of a Power that was content to leave them alone. Once a year the Resident of the district came round and composed the differences that they could not compose themselves, listened to their complaints, appointed a new headman when one was needed, and then left them to their own devices. They governed themselves according to their own customs and they were free to grow their rice, to marry, bring forth children, and die, to worship the gods they chose, without let or hindrance. They saw no soldiers and had no gaol. But I felt that these matters were not of my competence and so contented myself with the smaller office of amusing them. Though no speaker (I can count on one hand the speeches that on public occasions I have been induced to make), it was not hard to devise a few graceful and humorous remarks in return for the eggs, bananas, and rice which were presented to me.

It is not easy, however, to make forty different speeches about eggs, bananas, and rice, and the eggs I soon learnt by experience

were far from fresh. But thinking my interpreter would despise me if I said the same thing every day, in the morning as I rode along I racked my brain for new ways of expressing my gratification at my welcome and my present. I invented as one day followed another more than thirty different speeches and when I sat there while my interpreter translated what I had said, it was a satisfaction for me to see the little nods the headman and the elders gave me when a point had gone home and the way they shook themselves when they saw a joke. Now one morning I suddenly thought of an entirely new jest. It was a very good one and I saw in the twinkling of an eye how I could bring it into my speech. The lot of the English and the American humorist is hard, for pornography rather than brevity is the soul of wit, but the prudishness of his audience (and perhaps their sentimentality) has forced him to look for a laugh everywhere but where it is most easily to be found. But just as the poet may beat out more exquisite verse when he is constrained by the complicated measures of a Pindaric ode than when he has the elbow room of blank verse, so the difficulties placed in the way of our humorists have often resulted in their making unexpected discoveries in the ludicrous. They have found a rich load of laughter where but for the taboos they would never have sought it. The two pitfalls that threaten the humorist are the inane on one side and the disgusting on the other; and it is a regrettable fact, which the English or American humorist has to put up with, that the inane enrages more than the disgusting revolts.

But by this time I knew my public, and this joke, though I hope not coarse, just touched the obscene as a mosquito touches your face and then flies away buzzing when you slap. It amused me very much, and as I rode along I thought of the headman and the elders of the village I was approaching, on their knees on the floor in front of me, shaking with laughter and rolling from side to side.

We arrived. The village chief was a man of fifty-seven and he had been headman for thirty years. He brought his nephew, a shy youth with the beginnings of a beard, four or five elders, and the clerk, who sat a little by himself, a man of immeasurable age, wrinkled, with a sparse grey beard, a man so old that he seemed hardly human. He looked like a pagoda which is tumbling into ruin and soon the encroaching jungle will fall upon it and it will be no more.

In due time I made my speech and when I came to my good joke

the interpreter giggled and his eyes glistened. I was pleased. I finished and sat back in my chair while he translated my winged words. The little half-circle of listeners turned from me to him and watched him with dark, attentive eyes. He was a good speaker, my interpreter, fluent, with a gift of easy and descriptive gesture. I always felt that he did me justice. I had never made a wittier speech. I was surprised that it did not seem to go down. Not a smile rewarded any of my sallies; they listened politely, but no change in their expression suggested that they were either interested or amused. I had kept my best joke for the last and as I reckoned that it was approaching, a smile on my lips, I leaned forward. The interpreter finished. Not a laugh, not a chuckle. I will admit that I was put out. I signified to the headman that the ceremony was at an end, they shikoeed, struggled to their feet, and one after the other left the bungalow.

For a moment I hesitated.

"They didn't seem to me very intelligent," I hazarded.

"They were the stupidest lot of people we've come across," said my interpreter, and there was indignation in his tone. "I've made the same jokes every day and this is the first time they've never laughed."

I was a trifle startled. I was not sure that I understood.

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"What for you say all sorts of different things, sir? You take too much trouble for ignorant men like that. I make the same speech every day and they like it very much."

I was silent for a moment.

"For all you care I might just as well say the multiplication table," I said then, with what I thought a certain irony.

My interpreter smiled brightly, flashing a great many white teeth at me.

"Yes, sir, that will save you a lot of trouble," he said. "You say the multiplication table and then I make my speech."

The worst of it was that I could not be quite certain that I remembered it.

XIV

WHEN I set out in the early morning the dew was so heavy that I could see it falling, and the sky was grey; but in a little while the sun pierced through and in the sky, blue now, the

cumulus clouds were like the white sea-monsters gambolling sedately round the North Pole. The country was thinly peopled and on each side of the road was the jungle. For some days we went through pleasant uplands by a broad track, unmetalled but hard, its surface deeply furrowed by the passage of bullock-carts. Now and then I saw a pigeon and now and then a crow, but there were few birds. Then leaving the open spaces we passed through secluded hills and forests of bamboo. A bamboo forest is a graceful thing. It has the air of an enchanted wood and you can imagine that in its green shade the princess, heroine of an Eastern story, and the prince her lover might very properly undergo their incredible and fantastic adventures. When the sun shines through and a tenuous breeze flutters its elegant leaves, the effect is charmingly unreal: it has a beauty not of nature, but of the theatre.

At last we arrived at the Salween. This is one of the great rivers that rise far up in the Tibetan steppes, the Brahmaputra, the Irrawaddy, the Salween, and the Mehkong, and roll southwards in parallel courses to-pour their mighty waters into the Indian Ocean. Being very ignorant I had never heard of it till I went to Burma and even then it was nothing to me but a name. It had none of the associations that are for ever attached to such rivers as the Ganges, the Tiber, and the Guadalquivir. It was only as I went along that it gained a meaning to me and, with a meaning, mystery. It was a measure of distance, we were seven days from the Salween, then six; it seemed very remote; and at Mandalay I had heard people say:

"Don't the Rogers live on the Salween? You must go and stay with them when you cross."

"Oh, my dear fellow," someone expostulated, "they live right down on the Siamese frontier, he won't be going within three weeks' journey of them."

And when we passed some rare traveller on the road perhaps my interpreter after talking to him would come and tell me that he had crossed the Salween three days before. The water was high, but was going down; in bad weather it was no joke crossing. "Beyond the Salween" had a stirring sound and the country seemed dim and aloof. I added one little impression to another, a detached fact, a word, an epithet, the recollection of an engraving in an old book, enriching the name with associations as the lover in Stendhal's book decks his beloved with the jewels of his fancy, and soon the thought of the Salween intoxicated my imagination.

It became the Oriental river of my dreams, a broad stream, deep and secret, flowing through wooded hills, and it had romance, and a dark mystery so that you could scarcely believe that it rose here and there poured itself into the ocean, but like a symbol of eternity flowed from an unknown source to lose itself at last in an unknown sea.

We were two days from the Salween; then one. We left the high road and took a rocky path that wound through the jungle in and out of the hills. There was a heavy fog and the bamboos on each side were ghostly. They were like the pale wraiths of giant armies that had fought desperate wars in the beginning of the world's long history and now, lowering, waited in ominous silence, waited and watched for one knew not what. But every now and then, straight and imposing, rose dimly the shadow of a tall, an immensely tall, tree. An unseen brook babbled noisily, but, for the rest, silence surrounded one. No birds sang and the crickets were still. One seemed to go stealthily, as though one had no business there and dangers encompassed one all about. Spectral eyes seemed to watch one. Once when a branch broke and fell to the ground it was with so sharp and unexpected a sound that it startled one like a pistol shot.

But at last we came out into the sunshine and soon passed through a bedraggled village. Suddenly I saw the Salween shining silvery in front of me. I was prepared to feel like stout Cortez on his peak and was more than ready to look upon that sheet of water with a wild surmise, but I had already exhausted the emotion it had to offer me. It was a more ordinary and less imposing stream than I had expected; indeed then, and there, it was no wider than the Thames at Chelsea Bridge. It flowed without turbulence, swiftly and silently.

The raft (two dugouts on which was built a platform of bamboos) was at the water's edge and we set about unloading the mules. One of them, seized with a sudden panic, bolted for the river and before anyone could stop him plunged in. He was carried away on the current, I would never have thought that that turbid, sluggish stream had such a power; he was swept along the reach, swiftly, swiftly, and the muleteers shouted and waved their arms. We could see the poor brute struggling desperately, but it was inevitable that he would be drowned and I was thankful when a bend of the river robbed me of the sight of him. When with my pony and my personal effects I was ferried across the stream I

looked at it with more respect, and since the raft seemed to me none too secure I was not sorry when I reached the other side.

The bungalow was on the top of the bank. It was surrounded by lawns and flowers. Poinsettias enriched it with their brilliant hues. It had a little less than the austerity common to the bungalows of the P.W.D. and I was glad that I had chosen this place to linger at for a day or two in order to rest the mules and my own weary limbs. From the windows the river, shut in by the hills, looked like an ornamental water. I watched the raft going backwards and forwards bringing over the mules and their loads. The muleteers were cheerful because they were to get their rest and I had given the headman a trifling sum so that they could have a treat.

Then, their duties accomplished and the servants having unpacked my things, peace descended upon the scene, and the river, empty as though man had never adventured up its winding defiles, regained its dim remoteness. There was not a sound. The day waned and the peace of the water, the peace of the tree-clad hills, and the peace of the evening were three exquisite things. There is a moment just before sundown when the trees seem to detach themselves from the dark mass of the jungle and become individuals. Then you cannot see the wood for the trees. In the magic of the hour they seem to acquire a life of a new kind so that it is not hard to imagine that spirits inhabit them and with dusk they will have the power to change their places. You feel that at some uncertain moment some strange thing will happen to them and they will be wondrously transfigured. You hold your breath waiting for a marvel the thought of which stirs your heart with a kind of terrified eagerness. But the night falls; the moment has passed and once more the jungle takes them back. It takes them back as the world takes young people who, feeling in themselves the genius which is youth, hesitate for an instant on the brink of a great adventure of the spirit, and then engulfed by their surroundings sink back into the vast anonymity of human kind. The trees again become part of the wood; they are still and, if not lifeless, alive only with the sullen and stubborn life of the jungle.

The spot was so lovely and the bungalow with its lawns and trees so home-like and peaceful that for a moment I toyed with the notion of staying there not a day but a year, not a year but all my life. Ten days from a railhead and my only communication with

the outside world the trains of mules that passed occasionally between Taunggyi and Keng Tung, my only intercourse the villagers from the bedraggled village on the other side of the river, and so to spend the years away from the turmoil, the envy and bitterness and malice of the world, with my thoughts, my books, my dog, and my gun, and all about me the vast, mysterious, and luxuriant jungle. But alas, life does not consist only of years, but of hours, the day has twenty-four and it is no paradox that they are harder to get through than a year; and I knew that in a week my restless spirit would drive me on, to no envisaged goal, it is true, but on as dead leaves are blown hither and thither to no purpose by a gusty wind. But being a writer (no poet, alas! but merely a writer of stories) I was able to lead for others a life I could not lead for myself. This was a fit scene for an idyll of young lovers and I let my fancy wander as I devised a story to fit the tranquil and lovely scene. But, I do not know why unless it is that in beauty is always something tragic, my invention threw itself into a perverse mould and disaster fell upon the thin wraiths of my imagination.

But on a sudden I heard a commotion in the compound and, my Gurkha servant coming in at that moment with a gin and bitters, with which I was accustomed to bid the departing day farewell, I asked him what was the matter. He spoke tolerable English.

"The mule that was drowned, he come back," he said.

"Dead or alive?" I asked.

"Oh, he alive all right. The mule fellow he give mule a damn good beating."

"Why?"

"Teach him not to show off."

Poor mule! Freedom from the heavy load and the saddle that galled his sores, and that wild excitement when he saw the broad river before him and the green hills on the other side. Oh, for an escapade! Just a fling after all those days of humdrum labour and the joy of feeling the strength of one's limbs. The dash down to the river and then the irresistible force of the stream that carried one off, the desperate effort and the panting, the sudden fear of death, and at last, a couple of miles down, the struggle to the safe shore. The scamper along a jungle path and then the approach of night. Well, one had had one's fling and one felt all the better for it; now one could go back quite quietly to the compound where all the other mules were and one was ready next day or the day

after to take up one's load again and go quietly on one's way in the file, one's nose at the tail of the mule ahead of one; and when one got back, happy and rested after the adventure, they beat one because they said one had been showing off. As if one cared enough for them to bother to show off. Oh, well, it was worth a hiding. Whoops, dearie!

XV

I TOOK to the road once more. One day followed another with a monotony in which was nothing tedious. At dawn a cock, crowing loudly, woke me; and the various sounds in the compound, first one and then after a pause another, stealing upon the silence of the night a little uncertainly, as in a symphony one instrument takes up after another the first notes of a theme, the theme of day and the labour of man—the various sounds in the compound prevented me from going to sleep again: there was the bell around the neck of a mule that tinkled as he stirred or the shake another gave himself and the hee-haw of an ass; there were the lazy movements of the muleteers, their muffled talk, and their cries as they called their beasts. The gathering light crept into my room. Then I heard my servants moving and in a little while my Gurkha boy, Rang Lal by name, brought me my tea and took down my mosquito-curtains. I drank the tea and smoked the first delicious cigarette of the day. Pleasant thoughts crowded upon me, scraps of dialogue, a metaphor or a sonorous phrase, a trait or two to add to a character, an episode, and it was charming to lie there idly and let my fancy wander. But Rang Lal brought in my shaving water, silently, and the thought that it would soon grow cold urged me to get up. I shaved and had my bath, and breakfast was ready. If I was in luck the headman of the village or the *durwan* of the bungalow had made me a present of a *papaia*. This is a fruit that many people dislike and it is true that it needs getting used to; but when you have, you cannot but acquire a passion for it. It combines a clean and delicate savour with medicinal virtues (for does it not contain some almost incredible percentage of pepsine?) so that in eating it you not only satisfy the grossness of your appetite, but attend likewise to your soul's welfare. It is like a beautiful woman whose conversation is instructive and elevating.

Then I smoked my pipe and to clear my mind read, idly enough, I fear, some philosophical treatise that was not too heavy to hold in one hand. The first lot of mules had already got away, and now my bedding was rolled up, the things I had used for breakfast were put into the proper boxes, and everything was loaded on such of the mules as had remained behind. I let them get ahead. I was left alone in the bungalow, my pony tethered to a fence, and I watched with the eyes of my mind, so to say, while the village about me, the trees outside the bungalow, the chairs and tables, returned to the humdrum repose from which for a few hours the arrival of myself and my caravan had rudely snatched them. When I went down the steps and untethered my pony, silence, like an old mad woman with a finger on her lips, crept past me into the room that I had left. The map of the road hung on its nail more solidly because I was gone and the long chair in which I had been sitting gave a creaky sigh.

I started riding.

I caught up with the mules as they were nearing the bungalow and knowing it was close they increased their pace. They went along now with a sort of bustle, the bells ringing, the loads jangling, and the muleteers shouted to them and called out to one another. The muleteers were Yunnanese, strapping fellows, with bronzed faces, ragged and unwashed, but they bore themselves with a bold insouciance. Up and down Asia they marched with a lazy stride, hundreds upon hundreds of miles, and in their dark eyes were open spaces and the dim blue of far-off mountains. The mules crowded round them in the compound, each wanting his own load taken off first, and there was a shouting and a kicking and a jostling. The load is lashed to the yokes with leather thongs and it needs two men to take it off. When this was done the mule retreated a step or two and bowed his head as though he were bowing his thanks for the release. Then the pack-saddle was taken off him and he lay down on the ground and rolled over and over to ease his back of the irritation. One after the other as they were freed the mules wandered out of the compound to the herbage and their liberty.

Gin and bitters waited for me on the table, then my curry was served, and I flung myself in a long chair and went to sleep. When I woke I went out with my gun. The headman had designated two or three young men to show me where I could shoot pigeon or jungle-fowl, but game was shy and I am a bad shot and I came back

generally with nothing for my pains but a scramble in the bush. The light was failing. The muleteers called the mules, to shut them up for the night in the compound. They called in a shrill falsetto, a sound wild and barbaric that seemed scarcely human; it was a peculiar, even a terrifying, cry, and it suggested vaguely the vast distances of Asia and the nomad tribes of heaven knows how many ages back from which they were descended.

I read till my dinner was ready. If I had crossed a river that day I ate a bony, tasteless fish; if not, sardines or tunny; a dish of tough meat, and one of the three sweets that my Indian cook knew how to make. Then I played patience.

I reproached myself as I set out the cards. Considering the shortness of life and the infinite number of important things there are to do during its course, it can only be the proof of a flippant disposition that one should waste one's time in such a pursuit. I had with me a number of books that would have improved my mind and others, masterpieces of style, by the study of which I might have made progress in the learning of this difficult language in which we write. I had a volume, small enough to carry in my pocket, that contained all the tragedies of Shakespeare and I had resolved to read one act of one play on every day of my journey. I promised myself thus both entertainment and profit. But I knew seventeen varieties of patience. I tried the Spider and never by any chance got it out; I tried the patience they play at the Florence Club (and you should hear the shout of triumph which goes up when some Florentine of noble family, Pazzi or Strozzi, accomplishes it); and I tried a patience, the most incredibly difficult of all, that was taught me by a Dutch gentleman from Philadelphia. Of course the perfect patience has never been invented. This should take a long time to do; it should be complicated, calling forth all the ingenuity you have; it should require profound thought and demand from you solid reasoning, the exercise of logic, and the weighing of chances; it should be full of hairbreadth escapes so that your heart palpitates as you see what disaster might have befallen you had you put down the wrong card; it should poise you dizzy on the topmost peak of suspense when you consider that your fate hangs on the next card you turn up; it should wring your withers with apprehension; it should have desperate perils that you must avoid and incredible difficulties that only a reckless courage can surmount; and at the end, if you have made no mistake, if you have seized opportunity by the forelock and

wrung unstable fortune by the neck, victory should always crown your efforts.

But since such a patience does not exist, in the long run I generally returned to that which has immortalised the name of Canfield. Though it is of course very difficult to get out, you are at least sure of some result, and when all seems lost the turning of a sudden happy card may grant you a respite. I have heard that this estimable gentleman was a gambler in New York and he sold you the pack for fifty dollars and gave you five dollars for every card you got out. The establishment was palatial, supper was free and champagne flowed freely; negroes shuffled the packs for you. There were Turkey carpets on the floors and pictures by Meissonier and Lord Leighton on the walls, and there were life-sized statues in marble. I think it must have been very like Lansdowne House.

Looking back on it from this distance it had for me something of the charm of a genre picture and as I set out the seven cards, and then the six, I saw from my quiet room in the jungle bungalow (as it were through the wrong end of a telescope) the rooms brightly lit with glass chandeliers, the crowd of people, the haze of smoke, and the tense, strained, tragic feeling of the gambling-hell. I was held for a moment in the great world with its complications, vice, and dissipation. It is one of the mistakes that people make to think that the East is depraved; on the contrary the Oriental has a modesty that the ordinary European would find fantastic. His virtue is not the same as the European's, but I think he is more virtuous. Vice you must look for in Paris, London, or New York, rather than in Benares or Peking. But whether this is due to the fact that the Oriental, not being oppressed as we are by the sense of sin, feels no need to transgress the rules that during the long course of his history he has found it convenient to make, or whether, as is shown by his art and literature (which after all are only complicated but monotonous variations on a single theme), he is unimaginative, who am I to say?

It was time for me to go to bed. I got under my mosquito-curtain, lit my pipe and read the novel which I kept for that particular moment. I had looked forward to it all day. It was *Du Côté de Guermantes* and in my fear of coming to the end of it too quickly (I had read it before and could not really start on it again the moment I had finished it) I limited myself rigidly to thirty pages at a time. A great deal, of course, was exquisitely boring, but what did I care? I would sooner be bored by Proust than amused

by anybody else, and I finished the thirty pages all too soon; I seemed to have to hold back my eyes not to run along the lines too quickly. I put out my lamp and fell into a dreamless sleep.

But I could have sworn I had not been asleep ten minutes when a cock, crowing loudly, woke me; and the various sounds in the compound, first one and then after a pause another, broke in upon the silence of the night. The gathering light crept into my room. Another day began.

XVI

I LOST count of time. The track now could no longer be called a road and a bullock-cart could not have gone along it; it was no more than a narrow path and we went in single file. We began to climb, and a river, a tributary of the Salween, ran over rocks boisterously below us. The track wound up and down hills through the defiles of the range we were crossing, now at the level of the river, and then high above it. The sky was blue, not with the brilliant, provocative blue of Italy, but with the Eastern blue, which is milky, pale, and languorous. The jungle now had all the air of the virgin forest of one's fancy: tall trees, rising straight, without a branch, for eighty or a hundred feet, flaunted their power majestically in the sun. Creepers with gigantic leaves entwined them and the smaller trees were covered with parasitic plants as a bride is covered by her veil. The bamboos were sixty feet high. The wild plantains grew everywhere. They seemed set in their places by some skilful gardener, for they had the air of consciously completing the decoration. They were magnificent. The lower leaves were torn and yellow and bedraggled; they were like wicked old women who looked with envy and malice on the beauty of youth; but the upper ones, lissom, green, and lovely, lifted their splendour proudly. They had the haughtiness and the callous indifference of youthful beauty; their ample surface took the sun like water.

One day, looking for a short cut, I ventured along a path that led straight into the jungle. There was more life than I had seen while I kept to the highway; the jungle-fowl scurried over the tops of the trees as I passed, pigeons cooed all about me, and a horn-bill sat quite still on a branch to let me look at it. I can never quite get over my surprise at seeing at liberty birds and beasts

whose natural habitation seems a Zoological Garden, and I remember once, in a far island away down in the south-east of the Malay Archipelago, when I saw a great cockatoo staring at me I looked about for the cage from which it had escaped and could not realise for a moment that it was at home there and had never known confinement.

The jungle was not very thick and the sun finding its bold way through the trees diaped the ground with a coloured and fantastic pattern. But after a while it began to dawn on me that I was lost, not seriously and tragically lost as may happen to one in the jungle, but astray as one might be in the squares and terraces of Bayswater; I did not want to retrace my steps, and the pathway, with the sun shining on it, was tempting: I thought I would go on a little farther and see what happened. And suddenly I came upon a tiny village; it consisted of no more than four or five houses surrounded by a stockade of bamboos. I was as surprised to find it there, right in the jungle and six or seven miles from the main road, as its inhabitants must have been to see me, but neither they nor I would betray by our demeanour that there was anything odd about it. Small children playing on the dry, dusty ground scattered at my approach (I remembered how in one place I was asked if two little boys who had never seen a white man might be brought to have a look at me and were promptly carried away screaming with terror at the revolting sight); but the women, carrying buckets of water or pounding rice, went on unconcernedly with their tasks; and the men, sitting on their verandas, gave me but an indifferent glance. I wondered how those people had found their way there and what they did; they were self-subsistent, living a life entirely of their own, and as much cut off from the outside world as though they dwelt on an atoll in the South Seas. I knew and could know nothing of them. They were as different from me as though they belonged to another species. But they had passions like mine, the same hopes, the same desires, the same griefs. To them too, I suppose, love came like sunshine after rain, and to them too, I suppose, came satiety. But for them the days unchanging added their long line to one another without haste and without surprise; they followed their appointed round and led the lives their fathers had led before them. The pattern was traced and all they had to do was to follow it. Was that not wisdom and in their constancy was there not beauty?

I urged my pony on and in a few yards I was once more in the

thick of the jungle. I continued to climb, the path crossing and re-crossing little rushing streams, and then wound down, wound round the hills, the trees growing upon them so densely that you felt you could walk upon the tree-tops as though upon a green floor, until all sunny I saw the plain and the village for which I was bound that day.

It was called Mong Pying and I had made up my mind to rest there for a little. It was very warm and in the afternoon I sat in shirt-sleeves on the veranda of the bungalow. I was surprised to see approaching me a white man. I had not seen one since I left Taunggyi. Then I remembered that before leaving they had told me that somewhere along the road I should meet an Italian priest. I rose to meet him. He was a thin man, tall for an Italian, with regular features and large, handsome eyes. His face, sallow from malaria, was covered almost to the eyes with a luxuriant black beard that curled as boldly as the beard of an Assyrian king. And his hair was abundant, black and curling. I guessed him to be somewhere between thirty-five and forty. He was dressed in a shabby black cassock, stained and threadbare, a battered khaki helmet, white trousers, and white shoes.

"I heard you were coming," he said to me. "Just think, I haven't seen a white man for eighteen months."

He spoke fluent English.

"What will you have?" I asked him. "I can offer you whisky, or gin and bitters, tea or coffee."

He smiled.

"I haven't had a cup of coffee for two years. I ran out of it, and I found I could do without it very well. It was an extravagance and we have so little money for this mission. But it is a deprivation."

I told the Gurkha boy to make him a cup, and when he tasted it his eyes glistened.

"Nectar," he cried. "It is real nectar. People should do without things more. It is only then that you really enjoy them."

"You must let me give you two or three tins."

"Can you spare them? I will send you some lettuces from my garden."

"But how long have you been here, then?" I asked.

"Twelve years."

He was silent for a moment.

"My brother, who is a priest in Milan, offered to send me the

money to go back to Italy so that I might see my mother before she died. She is an old woman and she cannot live much longer. They used to say I was her favourite son and indeed when I was a child she used to spoil me. I should have liked to see her once more, but, to tell you the truth, I was afraid to go; I thought that if I did I should not have the courage to come back here to my people. Human nature is very weak, do you not think so? I could not trust myself." He smiled and gave a gesture that was oddly pathetic. "Never mind, we shall meet again in Paradise."

Then he asked me if I had a camera. He was very anxious to send a photograph of his new church to the lady in Lombardy through whose pious generosity he had been able to build it. He took me to it, a great wooden barn, severe and bare; the reredos was decorated with an execrable picture of Jesus Christ painted by one of the nuns at Keng Tung, and he begged me to take a photograph of this also so that when I went there and visited the convent I could show the nun how her work looked in place. There were two little pews for the scanty congregation. He was proud, as well he might be, because the church, the altar, and the pews had been built by himself and his converts. He took me to his compound and showed me the modest building which served as schoolroom and as sleeping-quarters for the children in his charge. I think he told me that there were six-and-thirty of them. He led me into his own little bungalow. The living-room was fairly spacious and this till the church was built he had used also as a chapel. At the back was a tiny bedroom no larger than a monk's cell, in which was nothing but a small wooden bed, a washing-stand and a bookshelf. Alongside of this was a tiny, rather dirty and untidy kitchen. There were two women in it.

"You see I am very grand now, I have a cook and a kitchen-maid," he said.

The younger woman had a hare-lip and, giggling, took pains to hide it with her hand. The Father said something to her. The other was squatting on the ground pounding some herb in a mortar and he patted her kindly on the shoulder.

"They have been here nearly a year now," he said. "They are mother and daughter. The woman, poor thing, has a malformed hand and the girl, as you see, that terrible lip."

The woman had had a husband and two children besides the girl with the hare-lip; but they had died suddenly, within a few weeks of one another, and the people of her village, thinking that

she was possessed of an evil spirit, drove her out, her and her daughter, penniless, into a world of which she knew nothing. She went to another village in the jungle where lived a catechist, for she had heard that the Christians did not fear the spirits, and the catechist was willing to give her lodging; but he was very poor and could not provide her with food. He told her to go to the Father. This was a five-day journey and it was the beginning of the rainy season. She and her daughter shouldered their small possessions, they were no more than they could carry in a little bundle on their backs, and set out, walking along the jungle paths, up and down the hills, and at night they slept in a village if they came upon one, and, if not, in such resting-place, in the shadow of a rock or under the branches of a tree, as they found by the wayside. But the people of the villages through which they passed sought to dissuade them from their purpose, for it was well known that the Father took children into his house and after a little while bore them away to Rangoon, where he offered them to the spirit of the sea and received money for them. They were terrified, but no village would keep them and the Father was their only refuge. They went on and at last, desperate but panic-stricken, presented themselves to him. He told them that they could live in an out-house and cook the rice for the children in the school.

We went into the living-room and sat down. It was bare of every sort of comfort. There was a large table and two or three wooden chairs, straight-backed and severe; there were shelves on which were a number of religious books, paper-bound and musty, and a great many Catholic periodicals. The only secular book I saw was that dreary masterpiece *I Promessi Sposi*. (When Manzoni met Sir Walter Scott, who complimented him on his work, he, acknowledging his debt to the Waverley Novels, said that it was not his book, but Sir Walter's; upon which Sir Walter replied, "Then it is my best book." But he spoke from his generous heart; it is of an almost intolerable tediousness.) But the Father received a daily paper from Italy, the *Corriere della Sera*, arriving in bundles once a month, and he told me that he read every word of every one.

"It amuses me," he said, "of course, but I do it also, as well, as a spiritual exercise, for I cannot afford to let my faculties rust. I know everything that is happening in Italy, what operas they are doing at the Scala, what plays are given, and what books are published. I read the political speeches. Everything. In that way I keep abreast of the world. My mind remains active. I do not

suppose I shall ever return to Italy, but if I do I shall step back into my environment as though I had never been away. In this kind of life one must never let go of oneself for a minute."

He talked fluently, in a resonant voice, and he was quick to smile; he had a loud and hearty laugh. When first he came to this place he put up at the P.W.D. bungalow and set about learning the language. The rest of his time he spent building the little house in which I now sat. Then he went out into the jungle.

"I can do nothing with the Shans," he told me. "They are Buddhists and they are satisfied with Buddhism. It suits them." He gave me a deprecating look of his fine black eyes and with a smile made a statement that I could see was so bold to his mind that he was a trifle startled at it himself. "You know, one must admit that Buddhism is a beautiful religion. I have long talks sometimes with the monk at the Pongyi Chaun, he is not an uneducated man, and I cannot but respect him and his faith."

He soon discovered that he could hope to influence only the people in the little lonely villages in the jungle, for they were spirit-worshippers and their lives were perplexed by the unceasing dread of the malignant powers that lay in wait to ensnare them. But the villages were far away, in the mountains, and often he had to go twenty, thirty, or even forty miles to reach them.

"Do you ride?" I asked.

"No, I walk. I don't say I wouldn't ride if I could afford a pony, but I am glad to walk. In this country you need plenty of exercise. I suppose that when I get old I shall have to have a pony, and by then I may have the money to buy one, but as long as I am in the prime of life there is no reason I should not travel on the legs God gave me."

It was his custom on arriving at a village to go to the headman's house and ask for lodging. When the people came back in the evening from their work he gathered them together on the veranda and talked to them. Now, after all these years, they knew him for forty miles around and they made him welcome. Sometimes a message came to ask him to go to some distant village that he had not yet visited so that they could hear what he had to say.

I remembered the lonely little village, shut off by the pressing growth of that dense verdure, that I had come upon in the jungle. I wanted to form in my mind's eye some picture of the lives those people led in it. The Father shrugged his shoulders when I questioned him.

"They work. Men and women work together. It is a constant round of unceasing toil. Believe me, life is not easy in the jungle villages up in the mountains. They sow their rice, and you know what time and trouble it takes, and then they reap it; they cultivate opium, and when they have an interval they go into the jungle to gather the jungle produce. They do not starve, but they only save themselves from starvation because they never rest."

As I wandered through the country, fording rivers or crossing them by rustic bridges, going up and down the tree-clad hills, passing between the rice fields, stopping for a night at one village of bamboo houses after another, talking with that long succession of headmen, their faces wizened or hardy, I seemed to myself like a figure in a tapestry that lined the halls of some old, infinitely deserted palace, an interminable tapestry of a sombre green in which you see dimly dark stiff trees and faded streams, hamlets of strange houses and shadowy people occupied without pause with actions that have a mystical, hieratic, and obscure significance. But sometimes when I arrived at a village and the headman and the elders, kneeling on the ground, gave me their presents, I had seemed to read in their large dark eyes a strange hunger. They looked at me humbly, as though they were expecting from me a message for which they had been long eagerly waiting. I wished that I could make them a discourse that would stir them; I wished that I could deliver to them the glad tidings for which they seemed to hanker. I could tell them nothing of a Beyond of which I knew nothing. The priest at least could give them something. I saw him arriving, footsore and weary, at some village and, when the approach of night prevented the people from working any longer, sitting on the floor on the veranda, lit by the moon perhaps, but perhaps only by the stars, and telling them, silent shadows in the darkness, things strange and new.

I do not think he was a very intellectual man; he had character, of course, and shrewdness. He knew quite well that the hill Shans let their children come to him only because he clothed, lodged, and fed them, but he shrugged his shoulders tolerantly; they would return to their hills when they were of a proper age, and though some would revert to the savage beliefs of their fathers, others would retain the faith he had taught them and by their influence perhaps lighten the darkness that surrounded them. He led too busy a life to have much time for reflection, and certainly there was in his mind no mystical strain; his faith was strong, as an

athlete's arms are muscular, and he accepted the dogmas of his religion as unquestioningly as you and I accept the fact of single vision or the flushing cheek. He told me that he had had a desire to come to the East as a missionary when he was still a seminarist and had studied in Milan to that end. He showed me a photograph of the group, sitting round the Bishop, who had come out with him, twelve of them, and pointed out to me those that were dead. This one had been drowned crossing a river in China, that one had died of cholera in India, and the other had been killed by the wild Was up in the north of the Shan States. I asked him when he had sailed and without a moment's hesitation he gave me the day of the week, the day of the month, and the year; whatever anniversaries they may forget, these nuns, monks, and secular priests, the date on which they left Europe remains on the tip of their tongues. Then he showed me a photograph of his family, a typical group of lower-middle-class people, such as you may see in the window of any cheap photographer in Italy. They were stiff, formal, and self-conscious, the father and mother sitting in the middle in their best clothes, two younger children arranged on the floor at their feet, a daughter on each side of them, and behind, standing according to their heights, a row of sons. The priest pointed out to me those that had entered religion.

"More than half," I commented.

"It has been a great happiness to our mother," he said. "It is her doing."

She was a stout woman, in a black dress, with her hair parted in the middle and large, soft eyes. She looked like a good house-keeper and I had little doubt that when it came to buying and selling she could drive a hard bargain. The priest smiled affectionately.

"She is a wonderful creature, my mother, she has had fifteen children and eleven of them are still alive. She is a saint, and goodness is as natural to her as a fine voice is to a *cantatrice*; it is no more difficult for her to do a beautiful action than it was for Adelina Patti to take C in alt. *Cara*."

He put the photograph back on the table.

When the next day but one I set out again, the Father said he would walk with me till we came to the hills, and so, slinging my pony's bridle over my arm, we trudged along while he gave me messages for the nuns at Keng Tung and impressed upon me not to forget to send him prints of the photographs I had taken. He

walked with his gun on his shoulder, an old weapon that looked to me much more dangerous to himself than to the beasts of the field; he was an odd figure in his battered helmet and his black cassock trussed up round his waist in order not to impede his gait, his white trousers tucked into his heavy boots. He walked with a long, slow stride and I could well imagine that the miles sagged away under it. But presently his sharp eyes caught sight of a kingfisher that sat on the low branch of a tree, green and blue, a little quivering, beautiful thing, poised there for a moment like a living gem; the Father put his hand on my arm to stop me and crept forward very softly, noiselessly, till he got to within ten feet; then he fired and when the bird dropped he sprang forward with a cry of triumph and picking it up threw it in the bag he carried slung to his side.

"That will help to make my rice tasty," he said.

But we reached the jungle and he stopped again.

"I shall leave you here," he said. "I must get back to my work."

I mounted my pony, we shook hands, and I trotted off. I turned back when I came to a bend of the path and waved as I saw him still standing where I had left him. He had his hand on the trunk of a tall tree and the green of the forest surrounded him. I went on and soon, I suppose, with that heavy tread of his that seemed not to spurn the earth but to stamp upon it with a jovial energy, as though it were friendly and would take his affectionate violence in good part (like a great, strong dog who wags his tail when you give him a hearty slap on the buttock)—soon, I suppose, he trudged back to the life from which for a day or two I had lured him. I knew that I should never see him again. I was going on to I knew not what new experiences and presently I should return to the great world with its excitement and vivid changes, but he would remain there always.

Much time has passed since then, and sometimes, at a party when women, their cheeks painted, with pearls round their necks, sit listening to a broad-bosomed *prima donna* singing the songs of Schumann, or at a first night when the curtain falls after an act and the applause is loud, and the audience bursts into amused conversation, my thoughts go back to the Italian priest, a little older now and greyer, a little thinner, for since then he has had two or three bouts of fever, who is jogging up the Shan hills along the forest paths, the same to-day and to-morrow as when I left him; and so it will be till one day, old and broken, he is taken ill

in one of those little mountain villages, and too weak to be moved down to the valley is presently overtaken by death. They will bury him in the jungle, with a wooden cross over him, and perhaps (the beliefs of generations stronger than the new faith he had taught) they will put little piles of stone about his grave and flowers so that his spirit may be friendly to the people of the village in which he died. And I have sometimes wondered whether at the end, so far from his kin, the headman of the village and the elders sitting round him silently, frightened to see a white man die—whether in a last moment of lucidity (those strange brown faces bending over him) fear will seize him and doubt, so that he will look beyond death and see that there is nothing but annihilation, and whether then he will have a feeling of wild revolt because he has given up for nothing all that the world has to offer of beauty, love and ease, friendship and art, and the pleasant gifts of nature, or whether even then he will think his brave life of toil and abnegation and endurance worth while. It must be a terrifying moment for those whom faith has sustained and supported all their lives, the moment when they must finally know whether their belief was true. Of course he had a vocation. His faith was robust and it was as natural to him to believe as to us to breathe. He was no saint to work miracles and no mystic to endure the pain and the ineffable pleasure of union with the Godhead, but as it were the common labourer of God. The souls of men were like the fields of his native Lombardy and without sentimentality, without emotion even, taking the rough with the smooth, he ploughed them and sowed, he protected the growing corn from the birds, he took advantage of the sunshine and grumbled because the rain was too much or too little, he shrugged his shoulders when the yield was scanty and took it as his due when it was abundant. He looked upon himself as a wage-earner like any other (but his wages were the glory of God and a world without end), and it gave him a sort of satisfaction to feel that he earned his keep. He gave the people his heart, and made no more fuss about it than did his father when he sold macaroni over the counter of his little shop in the Milanese.

XVII

I ENTERED upon the last lap of the journey to Keng Tung. For two or three days I went along the valleys by a level path, with a pretty stream flowing by the side of it; on its banks grew huge trees and now and again I saw a nimble monkey leaping from branch to branch; then I began to climb. I had to cross the divide between the basins of the Salween and the Mehkong and soon it grew very cold. Up and up we went. In the morning the mist swathed the surrounding hills, but here and there their tops emerged from it so that they looked like little green islets in a grey sea. The sun shining on the mist made a rainbow, and it was like the bridge that led to the gate of some fairy region of the underworld. A bitter wind blew around those bleak heights, and soon I was chilled to the bone. The mule track was muddy and very slippery, so that my pony kept his feet with difficulty and dismounting I walked. The mist was heavy now, and I could see but a few yards in front of me. The bell on the leader of my caravan was muffled and plaintive and the muleteers shivering trudged along by their beasts' sides in silence. The path wound through one defile after another, and at each bend I thought I had reached the pass, but the way still went uphill and it seemed interminable. Then suddenly I found myself sloping down. I had crossed the pass, which had needed so prolonged an effort to reach, without noticing it; it gave me a slight shock of disillusion. So when you have spent all your labour to achieve some ambition and have achieved it, it seems nothing to you and you go on somewhither without any sense of a great thing accomplished. And it may be that death is like that also. I should add that, this pass being no more than seven thousand feet high, to reach it was perhaps not so extraordinary a feat as to merit these pregnant reflections.

A similar incident occurred to Mr. Wordsworth when with his friend, Mr. Jones (Jones, as from Calais southward you and I), he crossed the Alps; but being a poet he wrote:

. . . whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,

*Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something ever more about to be.*

So simple is it when you know just how to put the best words in the best order to achieve beauty. The elephant can with his trunk pick up a sixpence and uproot a tree.

Then I came to a point from which they told me I could see Keng Tung, but the whole country was bathed in a silvery vapour and though I strained my eyes I could see nothing. I wound down and down and gradually emerged from the mountain mist and the sun was warm on my back. In the afternoon I came into the plain. The hills I had left were dark and the grey clouds were entangled in the trees that clad them. I trotted along a straight road, wide enough for a bullock-wagon, with rice fields, now only a brown and dusty stubble, on each side; I passed peasants with loads on their backs, or suspended on bamboos, going to town for the market next day; and at last I reached a broken brick gateway. It was the gate of Keng Tung. I had been twenty-six days on the journey.

Here I was met by a magistrate, a stoutish man of dignified aspect but of friendly reception, riding a mettlesome white pony, and some other official, who had come to greet me on behalf of the Sawbwa, the chieftain of that State. After we had exchanged the proper civilities we rode on through the main street of the town (but as the houses stood each in its compound with trees growing in it, it had no air of a street but rather of a road in a garden suburb), till we came to a circuit-house, at which I was to lodge. This was a long brick bungalow, placed on a hill without the town, whitewashed, with a veranda in front of it, and from the veranda I saw among trees the brown roofs of Keng Tung. All round were the green hills that surround it.

XVIII

I RODE down to the market on my little Shan pony. It was held on a great flat space in which were four rows of open booths and here the people jostled one another in a serried throng. I had wandered so long through country almost uninhabited that I was dazzled by the variety and the colour of the crowd. The sun shone brightly. In the wayside villages the peasants were dressed in

sombre hues, in blue or maroon, and often in black, but here the colours were brilliant. The women were neat and small and pretty, with flattened faces, and sallow rather than swarthy, but their hands were beautiful, as delicate as the flowers they wore in their hair, and finely attached to their slender wrists. They were dressed in a sort of skirt, called a *lungyi*, a long strip of silk wound round and tucked in at the waist, the upper part of which was in stripes of gay colours and the lower part pale green, maroon, or black, and they wore a little white bodice, very neat and modest, and over this a padded jacket, pale green or pink or black, like a Spanish bolero, with tight sleeves and little wings on the shoulders which suggested that at any moment they might fly smilingly away. The men wore coloured *lungyis* too or baggy Shan trousers. And a great many wore huge hats of finely plaited straw, like candle extinguishers, with enormous curved brims, and they perched uneasily on the abundant hair and headkerchiefs of men and women. These extravagant hats, hundreds of them, swaying, bobbing up and down with the restless movements of their wearers, were so fantastic that you could not persuade yourself that these people were busy with the serious affairs of life, but rather, engaged in a frolic, were having an enormous joke with one another.

As is usual in the East the sellers of the same things congregated together. The stalls were merely tiled roofs on posts, speaking well for the clemency of the climate, and the floor was either the trodden earth or a very low wooden platform. The selling was done for the most part by women; there were generally three or four of them in each stall, and they sat smoking long green cheroots. But in the medicine stalls the vendors were very old men, with wrinkled faces and bloodshot eyes, who looked like wizards. I observed their wares with consternation. There were piles of dried herbs and large boxes of powders of various colours, blue, yellow, red, and green, and I could not but think he must be a brave man who ventured upon them. In my childhood I have been beguiled into taking a dose of salts under the impression that as a reward for virtue I was being treated to a spoonful of plum jam (and have never been able to stomach plum jam since), but I cannot imagine how a fond Shan mother would conceal from her little Shan boy that she was administering to him a large handful of a gritty emerald powder. There were pills so large that I asked myself what throat was ever so capacious as to be able to wash them down with a drink of water. There were small dried animals

that looked like the roots of plants that had been dug out of the ground and left to rot, and there were roots of plants that looked like small dried animals. But the aged apothecaries suffered from no lack of custom. Trade was brisk that morning, and they were kept busy weighing out drugs, not with the flaky weights we use at home but with large pieces of lead cast in the form of the Buddha. At last my patience was rewarded, and having seen a man buy a dozen pills as large as bantam's eggs, I watched him take one in finger and thumb, open his mouth, drop it in and swallow. There was a struggle, for a moment his face bore a strained look, then he gave himself a jerk, and the pill was gone. The apothecary watched him with rheumy eyes.

XIX

IN the market was to be found everything to eat, to wear, and to furnish his house that was necessary to the needs of the simple Shan. There were silks from China, and the Chinese hucksters, sedately smoking their water-pipes, were dressed in blue trousers, tight-fitting black coats, and black silk caps. They were not lacking in elegance. The Chinese are the aristocracy of the East. There were Indians in white trousers, a white tunic that fitted closely to their thin bodies, and round caps of black velvet. They sold soap and buttons, and flimsy Indian silks, rolls of Manchester cotton, alarm clocks, looking-glasses, and knives from Sheffield. The Shans retailed the goods brought down by the tribesmen from the surrounding hills and the simple products of their own industry. Here and there a little band of musicians occupied a booth and a crowd stood round idly listening. In one three men beat on gongs, one played the cymbals, and another thumped a drum as long as himself. My uneducated ear could discern no pattern in that welter of sound, but only a direct and not unexhilarating appeal to crude emotion; but a little futher on I came across another band, not of Shans this time but of hillmen, who played on long wind instruments of bamboo and their music was melancholy and tremulous. Every now and then I seemed in its vague monotony to catch a few notes of a wistful melody. It gave you an impression of something immensely old. Every violence of statement had been worn away from it and every challenge to an energetic reaction, and there remained but subdued suggestions, on which the

imagination might work, and references, as it were, to desires and hopes and despairs deep buried in the heart. You had the feeling of a music recollected at night by the camp-fires of nomad tribes on their wanderings from the grass-lands of their ancient homes and begotten of the scattered sounds of the jungle and the silence of flowing rivers; and to my fancy (worked up now, as is the writer's way, by the power of the words, so difficultly controlled, that throng upon his imagination) it suggested the perplexity in the midst of strange and hostile surroundings of men who came they knew not whence and went they knew not whither, a plaintive, questioning cry and a song sung together (as men at sea in a storm tell one another lewd stories to drive away the uneasiness of the battering waves and the howling wind) to reassure themselves by the blessed solace of human companionship against the loneliness of the world.

But there was nothing doleful or forlorn in the throng that crowded the streets of the market. They were gay, voluble, and blithe. They had come not only to buy and sell, but to gossip and pass the time of day with their friends. It was the meeting-place not only of Keng Tung, but of the whole countryside for fifty miles around. Here they got the news and heard the latest stories. It was as good as a play and doubtless much better than most. Among the Shans, who were in the majority, wandered in their distinctive costumes members of many tribes. They held together in little groups as though, feeling shy in this foreign environment, they were afraid of being parted from one another. To them it must have seemed a vast and populous city, and they kept themselves to themselves with the countryman's odd mingling of awe and contempt for the inhabitants of a city. There were Tais, Laos, Kaws, Palaungs, Was, and heaven knows what else. The Was are divided by people wise in these matters into wild and tame, but the wild ones do not leave their mountain fastnesses. They are head-hunters, not from vainglory like the Dyaks, nor for æsthetic reasons like the people of the Mambwe country, but for the purely utilitarian purpose of protecting their crops. A fresh skull will guard and strengthen the growing grain, and so at the approach of spring from each village a small party of men goes out to look for a likely stranger. A stranger is sought since he does not know his way about the country and his spirit will not wander away from his earthly remains. It is said that travel in those parts is far from popular during the hunting season. But the tame Was have the

air of amiable and kindly people and certainly their appearance, though wild enough, is picturesque. The Kaws stand out from among the others by reason of their fine physique and swarthy colour. The authorities, however, state that the darkness of their complexion is due for the most part to their dislike of the use of water. The women wear a headdress covered with silver beads so that it looks like a helmet; their hair is parted in the middle and comes down over the ears as one sees it in the portraits of the Empress Eugénie, and in middle age they have funny little wrinkled faces full of humour. They wear a short coat, a kilt, and leggings; and there is quite an interval between the coat and the kilt: I could not fail to notice how much character it gives a woman's face to display her navel. The men are dressed in dingy blue, with turbans, and in these the young lads put marigolds as a sign that they are bachelors and want to marry. I wondered indeed if they kept them there or only put them in when the urge was strong upon them. For presumably no one feels inclined to marry on a cold and frosty morning. I saw one with half a dozen flowers in his turban. He was not going to leave his intentions in doubt. He cut a gay and jaunty figure, but the girls seemed to take no more notice of him than he, I am bound to confess, took of them. Perhaps they thought his eagerness was exaggerated and he, I suppose, having put his advertisement in the paper, as it were, was willing to leave it at that. He was a pleasant creature, of a dusky complexion, with large dark eyes, bold and shining, and he stood, with his back a trifle arched, as though all his muscles quivered with strength. There were peasants threading their way among the throng with pigeons on a perch tied by the leg with a string, which you might either buy to release and so acquire merit or add to the next day's curry. One of these men passing him, the young Kaw, evidently a careless fellow with his money, on a sudden impulse (and you saw on his mobile face how unexpectedly it came into his head) bought a pigeon, and when it was given to him he held it for a moment in both his hands, a grey wood pigeon with a pink breast, and then throwing up his arms with the gesture of the bronze boy from Herculaneum flung it high into the air. He watched it fly rapidly away, fly back to its native woods, and there was a boyish smile on his handsome face.

I SPENT the best part of a week in Keng Tung. The days were warm and sunny and the circuit-house neat, clean, and roomy. After so many strenuous days on the road it was pleasant to have nothing much to do. It was pleasant not to get up till one felt inclined and to breakfast in pyjamas. It was pleasant to lounge through the morning with a book. For it is an error to think that because you have no train to catch and no appointments to keep your movements on the road are free. Your times for doing this and that are as definite as if you lived in a city and had to go to business every morning. Your movements are settled not by your own whim, but by the length of the stages and the endurance of the mules. Though you would not think it mattered if you arrived half an hour sooner or later at your day's destination, there is always a rush to get up in the morning, a bustle of preparation and an urgent compulsion to get off without delay.

I kept the emotion with which Keng Tung filled me well under control. It was a village, larger than those I had passed on the way, but a village notwithstanding, of wooden houses, spacious, with wide dirt streets, and I was put to it to find objects of interest to visit. On other than market days it was empty. In the main street you saw nothing but a few gaunt pariah dogs. In one or two shops a woman, smoking a cheroot, sat idly on the floor; she had no thought that on such a day there would ever be a customer; in another, four Chinamen crouched on their heels were gambling. Silence. The dusty road had great ruts in it, and the sun beat down on it from a clear blue sky. Three little women suddenly appeared in monstrous, diverting hats and passed along in single file; they had a couple of baskets suspended by a bamboo over the shoulder and they walked with bent knees, speedily, as though if they went more slowly they would sink under their burdens. And against the emptiness of the street they made a quick and evanescent pattern.

And there was silence too in the monasteries. There are perhaps a dozen of them in Keng Tung and their high roofs stand out when you look at the town from the little hill on which is the circuit-house. Each one stands in its compound and in the compound are a number of crumbling pagodas. The great hall in which the Buddha, enormous, sits in his hieratic attitude, surrounded by

others, eight or ten, hardly smaller, is like a barn, but its roof is supported by huge columns of teak, gilt or lacquered, and the wooden walls and the rafters are gilt or lacquered too. Rude paintings of scenes in the Master's life hang from the eaves. It is dark and solemn, but the Buddhas sit on their great lotus leaves in the gloaming like gods who have had their day, and now neglected, but indifferent to neglect, in their decaying grandeur of gilt and mosaic continue to reflect on suffering and the end of suffering, transitoriness, and the eightfold path. Their aloofness is almost terrifying. You tread on tiptoe in order not to disturb their meditations and when you close behind you the carved and gilded doors and come out once more into the friendly day it is with a sigh of relief. You feel like a man who has gone by accident to a party at the wrong house and on realising his mistake makes his escape quickly and hopes that no one has noticed him.

XXI

MUSING upon the odd chance that had brought me to that distant spot, my idle thoughts gathered about the tall, aloof figure of the casual acquaintance whose words spoken at random had tempted me to make the journey. I tried from the impressions he had left upon me to construct the living man. For when we meet people we see them only in the flat, they offer us but one side of themselves, and they remain shadowy; we have to give them our flesh and our bones before they exist in the round. That is why the characters of fiction are more real than the characters of life. He was a soldier and for five years had been in command of the Military Police Post at Loimwe, which is a few miles south-east of Keng Tung. Loimwe signifies the Hill of Dreams.

I do not think he was a great hunter, for I have noticed that most men who live in places where game is plentiful acquire a distaste for killing the wild creatures of the jungle. When on their arrival they have shot this animal or that, the tiger, the buffalo, or the deer, for the satisfaction of their self-esteem, they lose interest. It suggests itself to them that the graceful creatures, whose habits they have studied, have as much right to life as they; they get a sort of affection for them, and it is only unwillingly that they take their guns to kill a tiger that is frightening the villagers, or woodcock or snipe for the pot.

Five years is a big slice out of a man's life. He spoke of Keng Tung as a lover might speak of his bride. It had been an experience so poignant that it had set him apart for ever from his fellows. He was reticent and, as is the English way, could tell but in clumsy words what he had found there. I do not know whether even to himself he was able to put into plain language the vague emotions that touched his heart when in a secluded village at night he sat and talked with the elders and whether he asked himself the questions, so new and strange to one of his circumstances and profession, that stood in silence (like homeless men in winter outside a refuge for the destitute) waiting to be answered. He loved the wild wooded hills and the starry nights. The days were interminable and monotonous, and on them he embroidered a vague and misty pattern. I do not know what it was. I can only guess that it made the world he went back to, the world of clubs and mess-tables, of steam-engines and motor-cars, dances and tennis parties, politics, intrigue, bustle, excitement, the world of the newspapers, strangely without meaning. Though he lived in it, though he even enjoyed it, it remained utterly remote. I think it had lost its sense for him. In his heart was the reflection of a lovely dream that he could never quite recall.

We are gregarious, most of us, and we resent the man who does not seek the society of his fellows. We do not content ourselves with saying that he is odd, but we ascribe to him unworthy motives. Our pride is wounded that he should have no use for us and we nod to one another and wink and say that if he lives in this strange way it must be to practise some secret vice and if he does not inhabit his own country it can only be because his own country is too hot to hold him. But there are people who do not feel at home in the world, the companionship of others is not necessary to them and they are ill-at-ease amid the exuberance of their fellows. They have an invincible shyness. Shared emotions abash them. The thought of community-singing, even though it be but *God Save the King*, fills them with embarrassment, and if they sing, it is plaintively in their baths. They are self-sufficient and they shrug a resigned and sometimes, it must be admitted, a scornful shoulder because the world uses that adjective in a depreciatory sense. Wherever they are they feel themselves "out of it". They are to be found all over the surface of this earth, members of a great monastic order bound by no vows and cloistered though not by walls of stone. If you wander up and down the

world you will meet them in all sorts of unexpected places. You are not surprised when you hear that an elderly English lady is living in a villa on a hill outside a small Italian town that you have happened on by an accident to the car in which you were driving, for Italy has always been the preferred refuge of these staid nuns. They have generally adequate means and an extensive knowledge of the *cinque cento*. You take it as a matter of course when a lonely *hacienda* is pointed out to you in Andalusia and you are told that there has dwelt for many years an English lady of a certain age. She is usually a devout Catholic and sometimes lives in sin with her coachman. But it is more surprising when you hear that the only white person in a Chinese city is an Englishwoman, not a missionary, who has lived there, none knows why, for a quarter of a century; and there is another who inhabits an islet in the South Seas and a third who has a bungalow on the outskirts of a large village in the centre of Java. They live solitary lives, without friends, and they do not welcome the stranger. Though they may not have seen one of their own race for months they will pass you on the road as though they did not see you, and if, presuming on your nationality, you call, the chances are that they will decline to receive you; but if they do they will give you a cup of tea from a silver tea-pot and on a plate of old Worcester you will be offered hot scones. They will talk to you politely, as though they were entertaining you in a drawing-room overlooking a London square, but when you take your leave they express no desire ever to see you again.

The men are at once shyer and more friendly. At first they are tongue-tied and you see the anxious look on their faces as they rack their brains for topics of conversation, but a glass of whisky loosens their minds (for sometimes they are inclined to tittle) and then they will talk freely. They are glad to see you, but you must be careful not to abuse your welcome; they get tired of company very soon and grow restless at the necessity of making an effort. They are more apt to run to seed than women, they live in a higgledy-piggledy manner, indifferent to their surroundings and their food. They have often an ostensible occupation. They keep a little shop, but do not care whether they sell anything, and their goods are dusty and fly-blown; or they run, with lackadaisical incompetence, a coconut plantation. They are on the verge of bankruptcy. Sometimes they are engaged in metaphysical speculation, and I met one who had spent years in the study and annota-

tion of the works of Immanuel Swedenborg. Sometimes they are students and take endless pains to translate classical works which have been already translated, like the dialogues of Plato, or of which translation is impossible, like Goethe's *Faust*. They may not be very useful members of society, but their lives are harmless and innocent. If the world despises them, they on their side despise the world. The thought of returning to its turmoil is a nightmare to them. They ask nothing but to be left in peace. Their satisfaction with their lot is sometimes a trifle irritating. It needs a good deal of philosophy not to be mortified by the thought of persons who have voluntarily abandoned everything that for the most of us makes life worth living and are devoid of envy of what they have missed. I have never made up my mind whether they are fools or wise men. They have given up everything for a dream, a dream of peace or happiness or freedom, and their dream is so intense that they make it true.

XXII

BUT I had idled long enough, and so, bright and early one morning, I set out with my caravan from Keng Tung. I was accompanied by an official of the Sawbwa's court who was to escort me to the frontier of the Sawbwa's dominions. He was a corpulent gentleman and he rode a very small and scraggy pony. For the first day I rode through the plain with rice fields on either side of the road and then plunged once more into the hills. I had finished now with the P.W.D. bungalows, but the Sawbwa had been good enough to order houses to be built for me on the way and messengers had been sent on to the various villages with the necessary instructions. I felt very grand to have a house built for me to spend a single night in and the first one I lodged at filled me with delight. It was like a toy. It would hardly have kept out the wet if it rained or the wind if it blew, but in fine weather it was a place for young lovers to live in rather than a middle-aged writer. It was very neat and clean, for the bamboos of which it was made had been cut that morning, and it had the pleasant, fresh smell of growing things. It was all green, walls, floor, and roof. It consisted of two rooms and a broad veranda. The walls and the floor, raised about three feet from the ground, were of split bamboos. The supporting pillars and the beams were of whole bamboos,

and the roof was neatly thatched with rice straw. The floor was resilient, so that, accustomed to an unyielding surface underfoot, I had at first a feeling of some insecurity and walked gingerly; but there was a network of solid bamboos under it and it was really as strong as could be desired. Within a few feet was a rushing mountain stream (I had crossed it half a dozen times during the day either by a ford or a rickety bridge) and its banks were thickly grown with trees. In front was a little open space where cattle grazed and the view was shut in by a green hill. It was an enchanting spot.

One day, the letter sent on ahead to arrange accommodation having been received but that morning, on arriving at the end of the stage I found the villagers, gathered from a village some miles off, for this was in the middle of the jungle, still busy with the construction of my house. It was of course very curious to watch the speed and deftness with which with their rude knives they cut and split the bamboos in order to make the floor, the ingenuity with which they fitted the rafters and the neatness with which they thatched the roof; but it did not interest me. I was tired and hungry, I wanted a cook-house so that my dinner could be prepared, and I wanted a place for my bed so that I could lie down and rest. I lost my temper and my common sense. I sent for the Sawbwa's official and abused him roundly for his slackness. I vowed I would send him back to his master and threatened him with every sort of punishment my angry imagination could devise. I would not listen to his excuses. I stamped and raved. Now, no one had ever troubled in my life before to treat me with such consideration and though I have travelled much in out-of-the-way parts of the world I have had to shift for myself and lodge at haphazard wherever I could find a lodging. I have slept quite happily for seven days in an open rowing boat and in South Sea islands shared a native hut open to the wind and rain with a family of Kanakas. No one had even thought of building a house for me, and in the middle of the jungle besides, and it was an attention to which I had no right. The moral is that even the most sensible person can very easily get above himself: grant him certain privileges and before you know where you are he will claim them as his inalienable right; lend him a little authority and he will play the tyrant. Give a fool a uniform and sew a tab or two on his tunic and he thinks that his word is law.

But when my house was finished, a green house in a green glade

glade with the torrent plashing noisily between its green banks, and I had eaten, I laughed at myself. At Keng Tung I had bought some rum off a Gurkha when I discovered that my supply of gin was running low and feared that I should have to finish my journey on tea and coffee; it was good rum, home-made, but I did not like it; so to mark the sincere contrition I felt for having behaved with so little sense I sent the Sawbwa's official two bottles.

XXIII

IN reading the books of explorers I have been very much struck by the fact that they never tell you what they eat and drink, unless they are driven to extremities and shoot a deer or a buffalo that replenishes their larder when they have drawn in their belts to the last hole; or are so much in want of water that their pack animals are dying and it is only by the merest chance that at the very last moment they come across a well, or by the exercise of the most ingenious ratiocination hit upon a spot where in the evening and the distance they see a shining that tells them that after a few more weary miles they will find ice to quench their thirst. Then a look of relief crosses their set, grim faces and perchance a grateful tear courses down their unwashed cheeks. But I am no explorer and my food and drink are sufficiently important matters to me to persuade me in these pages to dwell on them at some length. I keep a pleasant place in my memory for the *durwan* of a bungalow on the way to Keng Tung who brought me with obsequious gestures a lordly dish covered with a napkin, removing which he craved my acceptance of two large cabbages. I had eaten no green vegetables for a fortnight and they tasted to me more delicious than peas fresh from a Surrey garden or young asparagus from Argenteuil. It is a charming sight and wonderfully exalting to the soul, when you ride wearily into a village, to come upon a duck-pond on which are swimming fat ducks, the unconscious of the fact that next day one of them, the fattest, the youngest, the most tender, with baked potatoes and abundant gravy is destined (who can escape his fate?) to make you a succulent dinner. Late in the afternoon, just before the sun is setting, you take an easy stroll and a little way from the compound you catch sight of two green pigeons flying about the trees. They run along the pathway, seeming playfully to chase each other, they are tame and friendly, and

unless you have a heart of stone you cannot but be touched by the sight of them. You reflect on the innocence and bliss of their lives. You remember vaguely the fable of La Fontaine which in your childhood you learned by heart and shyly repeated when visitors came to see your mother:

*Deux pigeons s'aimaient d'amour tendre.
L'un d'eux, s'ennuyant au logis,
Fut assez fou pour entreprendre
Un voyage en lointain pays.*

The charming and obscene Laurence Sterne would have been moved to tears by the sight of the dainty creatures and he would have written a passage that would have wrung your heart. But you are made of sterner stuff. You have a gun in your hands and though you are a bad shot they are an easy mark. In a little while the native who has accompanied you holds them in his hand, but he is unconcerned and sees nothing pathetic in those pretty little birds, but a moment ago so full of life, dead before him. How good they are, fat, succulent, and juicy, when Rang Lal, the Gurkha, brings them roasted to a turn for your breakfast next morning!

My cook was a Telugu, a man of mature age; his face, of a dark mahogany, was thin, ravaged, and lined, and his thick hair was dully streaked with silver. He was very lean, a tall, saturnine creature of a striking appearance in his white turban and white tunic. He walked with long strides and a swinging step, covering the twelve to fourteen miles of the day's march without fatigue or effort. It startled me at first to see this bearded and dignified person nimbly shin up a tree in the compound and shake down the fruit he needed for some sauce. Like many another artist his personality was more interesting than his work; his cooking was neither good nor varied, one day he gave me trifle for my dinner and the next cabinet pudding: they are the staple sweets of the East, and as one sees them appear on table after table, made by a Japanese at Kyoto, a Chinese at Amoy, a Malay at Alor Star, or a Madrassi at Moulmein, one's sympathetic heart feels a pang at the thought of the drab lives of those English ladies in country vicarages or seaside villas (with the retired colonel their father) who introduced them to the immemorial East. My own knowledge of these matters is small, but I made so bold as to teach my Telugu how to make a corned beef hash. I trusted that after he left me he would pass on the precious recipe to other cooks and

that eventually one more dish would be added to the scanty repertory of Anglo-Eastern cuisine. I should be a benefactor of my species.

It had occurred to me that the cook-house was very disorderly and none too clean, but in these matters it is unwise to be squeamish; when you think of all the disagreeable things that go on in your inside it seems absurd to be too particular about the way in which is prepared what you put into it. It must be accepted that from a kitchen that is neat and shining like a new pin you do not often get food that is very good to eat. But I was taken aback when Rang Lal came to me with complaints that the Telugu was so dirty that no one could eat what he prepared. I went into the cook-house again and saw for myself; it was impossible not to notice also that my cook was very much the worse for liquor. I was told then that he was often so drunk that Rang Lal had to do the cooking himself. We were a fortnight's journey from any place where I might have replaced him, so I contented myself with such vituperation (not very effective since it had to be translated into Burmese, which he understood but little) as I was master of. I think the most biting thing I said was that a drunken cook should at least be a good one, but he merely looked at me with large mournful eyes. He did not wince. At Keng Tung he went on a terrific spree and did not appear for three days; I looked about for someone to take his place, for I had four weeks' journey ahead of me before I could reach the railhead in Siam, but there was no one to be found, so when he reappeared, very sorry for himself and woe-begone, I assumed the part of one who is cut to the quick but magnanimous. I forgave him and he promised that for the rest of the journey he would abstain. One should be tolerant of the vices of others.

Now, passing through the villages, I had often seen little pigs scurrying about the posts on which the houses were built, and about a week after I left Keng Tung it occurred to me that a sucking-pig would make a pleasant change to my daily fare; so I gave instructions to buy one at the next opportunity, and one day on arriving at the bungalow I was shown a little black pig lying at the bottom of a basket. It did not look more than a week old. For a few days it was carried in its basket from stage to stage by a young Chinese boy I had engaged at Keng Tung to help my drunken cook, and the boy and Rang Lal played with it. It was a pet. I meant to keep it for a special occasion and often, as I rode

along, I indulged in a pleasing reverie on the excellent dinner it would make; I could not hope for apple sauce, but my mouth watered at the thought of the crackling, and I told myself that the flesh would be sweet and tender. Anxiously I asked the Telugu if he was quite certain he knew how to cook it. He swore by the heads of all his ancestors that there was nothing about roasting a pig that he did not know. Then I halted for a day to give the mules and the men a rest, and I ordered the sucking-pig to be killed. But when it came to the table (how vain are human hopes!) there was no crackling, there was no white tender meat, it was just a brown, sloppy, stinking mess, it was uneatable. For a moment I was dismayed. I wondered what on earth the great explorers would do in such a pass. Would a frown darken the stern face of Stanley and would Dr. Livingstone preserve unruffled his Christian temper? I sighed. Not for this was the little black sucking-pig reft untimely from his mother's breast. It had been better to leave him to lead a happy life in his Shan village. I sent for the cook. Presently he came supported on one side by Rang Lal and on the other by Kyuzaw, my interpreter. When they let go of him he swayed slowly from side to side like a schooner at anchor in a swell.

"He's drunk," I said.

"He's as drunk as a lord," answered Kyuzaw, who had been to the rajah's school at Taunggyi and knew many a racy English idiom.

(Once upon a time somebody called upon one of the most eminent of the Victorians early one morning and was told by the butler:

"His lordship isn't up yet, sir."

"Oh, at what time does he have breakfast?"

Then the butler, imperturbable: "He doesn't have breakfast, sir. His lordship is generally sick about eleven.")

The Telugu looked at me and I looked at the Telugu. There was no understanding in his lustrous eyes.

"Take him away," I said. "Give him his wages in the morning and tell him to get out."

"Very good, sir," said Kyuzaw. "I think that's best."

They removed him and there was a great clatter and a thud outside on the steps, but whether the Telugu had fallen down them or whether Kyuzaw and Rang Lal had thrown him I did not think it necessary to ask.

Next morning while I was having breakfast on my veranda Kyuzaw came in to ask for the day's instructions and to gossip. The bungalow was on the edge of a considerable village. And there was more life and movement than you see generally in the Shan villages. The day before, when I arrived, perhaps a little before I was expected, the women wore nothing but their *lungyi*s, drawn up just to cover their breasts, and the upper part of their bodies were naked, but to-day, I fear in deference to the importance they were good enough to ascribe to me, they wore little bodices and were less pleasing of aspect. Suddenly the cook appeared in front of the bungalow. He had a bundle on his shoulder and this he put down on the ground beside him. He gave me a deep and solemn bow, then quickly took up his bundle, turned round and walked off.

"I gave him his wages and money for his keep," said Kyuzaw.

"Is he going?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. You said he was to go the first thing this morning. He cooked your breakfast and now he is going."

I did not say anything. My word was law, and I suppose it bound me more sternly than anyone else. It was twelve days to Keng Tung, and the Telugu would foot it day after day seldom seeing a human face, and then it was twenty-three days more to Taunggyi. He took the path that led into the jungle and my eyes followed him. I had often noticed his long, swinging stride. But now, emaciated, in his dingy Eastern clothes, his turban slovenly tied, he looked incredibly forlorn and under the weight of his bundle seemed to walk with lassitude. I did not really care if he was dirty and drunk, and I had dined just as happily off tinned tongue as off a sucking-pig. He seemed now very small and frail as he trudged on and soon he would be lost to sight in the immensity of Asia. There was something immeasurably pathetic, nay, tragic even, in the sight of that old man stepping out thus into the unknown. In his lagging gait I seemed to read the despair of one who had been beaten by life. I suppose that Kyuzaw saw my uneasiness, for with his frank and tolerant smile he said:

"You were very patient with him, sir. I would have sent him away long ago."

"Was he upset when you told him?"

"Oh no, sir. He knew he deserved it. He is not a bad man, a thief, drunken and very dirty, but that is all. He will find another place when he gets back to Taunggyi."

XXIV

THE uneventful days followed one another like the rhymed couplets of a didactic poem. The country was sparsely inhabited. On the road we met no one but a few Kaws, and now and then we saw their villages perched on the side of a hill. The stages were long and when we arrived at the end of the day's journey we were exhausted. There was no road, but only a narrow pathway, and where it ran under the trees it was thick with mud, and the ponies stumbled through it splashing; sometimes it came up to their knees and it was impossible to go at more than a snail's pace. It was hard work and dreary. We went up and down low hills, winding in and out by the side of the river, and this, which at first was but a narrow stream that one could ford easily, grew day by day into a broad and rushing torrent. The last time we forded it, it was deep enough to come up to the bellies of the ponies. Then it became a great flow of water, tumultuous in places where it dashed over rocks, and then flowing calm and swift. We crossed it on a bamboo raft attached to each bank by a bamboo rope and pulled ourselves over. Most of the tropical rivers that the traveller sees are very wide, but this one, overhung with an immense luxuriance of vegetation, was as narrow as the Wey. But you could never have mistaken it for an English river, it had none of the sunny calm of our English streams, nor their smiling nonchalance; it was dark and tragic and its flow had the sinister intensity of the unbridled lusts of man.

We camped beside it, among lofty trees, and at night the noise of the crickets and the frogs and the cries of the birds were loud and insistent. There is a notion abroad that the jungle at night is silent and writers have often been eloquent on the subject; but the silence they have described is spiritual; it is a translation of the emotion of solitude and of distance from the world of men and of the sense of awe that comes from the darkness and the solemn trees and the pressing growth of the greenwood; in sober fact the din is tremendous, so that till you become accustomed to it you may find it hard to sleep. But when you lie awake listening to it there is a strange uneasiness in your heart that does feel oddly like a terrible, an unearthly stillness.

But at last we reached the end of the jungle, and the track, though uneven and bad, was wide enough for a bullock-cart. From

my rest-house there was a broad view of the padi fields and the hills in the distance were blue. Though they were the same hills that I had been crossing for I do not know how many days they had now a strangely romantic air. In their depths was magic. It was surprising to find what a difference it made to one's spirits to be once more in the open country. It was not till then that one realised how much the long days of travelling through the jungle had depressed them. One felt on a sudden content and well-disposed towards one's fellows.

Then we came to a large and prosperous village, called Hawng Luk, with a spacious and well built rest-house, and this was the last place we stayed at before reaching Siam. The hills in front of us were Siamese hills. I think we all had a feeling of elation as we approached the frontier. We passed through a trim little village (as we neared Siam the villages, touched by the greater civilisation of the country we were entering, seemed more prosperous) over a quaint covered bridge and then came to a small, sluggish stream. This was the boundary. We forded it and were in Siam.

XXV

WE came to a wood of young teak trees and rode through this till we reached the village at which I had arranged to pass the night. Here there was a police post, neat and trim, with flowers in the garden; the sergeant in charge, notwithstanding his khaki uniform and the tidy little soldiers under him somewhat flustered at the sight of a white man and such an imposing retinue, telling us that there was no rest-house, directed us to the monastery. It was about a quarter of a mile from the main road and I rode up to it through the rice fields. It was a very poor little monastery, consisting only of a sort of barn of sun-baked bricks, in which were the images, and a wooden bungalow, in which lived the monks and their pupils. Here my bed was set up and my camp equipment, in the temple itself, with the images looking down on me. It caused no scandal to the monks or the novices. They scanned my possessions with eager interest, they watched me eat as the crowd watches the wild beasts eat at the Zoo, and in the evening they stood round me with wondering eyes when I played patience. After a little while they caught the sense of my complicated motions and a little gasp was wrung from them (like that flattering,

anguished sob that breaks from a silent audience as a trapezist a hundred feet from the ground does the *salto mortale*) when with a bold gesture I transferred a dozen fitting cards to a line when there was a place for them. But such is the infirmity of human nature that no sooner had one of them got an inkling of what I was doing and in an agitated whisper explained to the others, than all with excited cries and gestures of delight pressed round about me; they snatched at my arm to point out to me a card that I should move (and how was I who knew no Siamese to explain that you could never, never put a six of hearts on a seven of diamonds?); I had to restrain them by force from moving a card which I meant to move myself when I had sufficiently considered the matter, and when I did so my action was greeted with applause. No man, be he a monk in a Buddhist monastery or Prime Minister of England, can forbear to give advice when he watches somebody else doing a patience.

At eight the novices said their prayers, in a sing-song monotonous tone, some of them smoking cheroots the while, and then I was left alone for the night. There was no door to the temple and the blue night entered and the images on their tables shone dimly. The floor was clean, swept by women to acquire merit, but there were thousands of ants, attracted I suppose by the rice brought in offering by the devout, and they made sleep difficult. After a while I gave it up as a bad job and got up. I went to the doorway and looked out at the night. The air was balmy. I saw someone moving about and presently discovered that it was Kyuzaw. He also could not sleep. I offered him a cheroot and we sat down on the steps of the temple. He was a trifle contemptuous of this Siamese Buddhism. The monks did not go out with their begging bowls, it appeared, as the Blessed One had directed, but let the faithful bring them their rice and food to the monastery. Kyuzaw, like most Shans, had at one time been a novice and he told me, not without complacency, that he had never failed to go out with the begging bowl. He gave a little chuckle.

"I always went to my own house first and got a well-cooked meal put in the bottom of my bowl. I covered it with a leaf and went on my round till the bowl was filled. Then I went back to the monastery, threw away to the dogs all that was above the leaf, and ate my own good dinner."

I asked him if he liked the life. He shrugged his shoulders.

"There was nothing to do," he said. "Two hours' work in the

morning and there were prayers at night, but all the rest of the day nothing. I was glad when the time came for me to go home again."

I inveigled him to speak of transmigration.

"There was a man in a village near my home who remembered his old life. He had been dead eighteen years' and he came to the village and he recognised his wife and he told her where they used to keep their money and he reminded her of things that she had long forgotten. He went into the house and said that one of the pots had been mended in such a way, and they looked at it and it had been mended in the way he said. The woman cried and all the neighbours were amazed and people came to see him from all over the country. They wrote about it in the paper. They asked him questions and to every question he had an answer. He knew everything that had happened in the village during his previous existence and the people remembered that what he said was true. But it did not end well."

"Why, what happened?" I asked.

"Well, his sons were grown up and they had divided the land and the buffaloes. They did not want to give everything back again. They said he had had his time and now it was their turn. He said he would go to law and the mother said she would testify that what he said was true. You see, sir, she liked to have a fine young husband again, but the sons did not want to have a fine young father, so they took him aside and said that if he did not go away they would beat him till he died, so he took the money that was in the house and everything he could lay hands on and went away."

"Did he take his wife, too?"

"No, he did not take her. He did not tell her he was going. He just went away. She was very sorry. And of course she had nothing any more."

We talked till we had finished our cheroots, and then Kyuzaw got me some paraffin and we put it on the legs of my bed to keep the ants away and I went back to bed and slept. But the door of the temple looked due East and the dawn woke me and I saw a huge expanse of rose and purple. Then a little novice came in with a platter on which were four or five cakes of rice. He went down on his heels, a tiny little figure in yellow, with large black eyes, and uttered a brief invocation and then left the platter before the images. He had hardly gone before a pariah dog, evidently on

the watch, slipped in quickly, seized one of the cakes in his mouth and ran out again. The early sun caught the gold on the Buddha and gave it a richness not its own.

XXVI

I TRAVELLED leisurely down Siam. The country was pleasant, open and smiling, scattered with neat little villages, each surrounded with a fence, and fruit trees and areca palms growing in the compounds gave them an attractive air of modest prosperity. There was a good deal of traffic on the road, but it was carried on not, as in the little-inhabited Shan States, by mules, but by bullock-carts. Where the country was flat, rice was cultivated, but where it undulated, teak forests grew. The teak is a handsome tree, with a large smooth leaf; it does not make a very dense jungle and the sun shines through. To ride in a teak forest, so light, graceful, and airy, is to feel yourself a cavalier in an old romance. The rest-houses were clean and trim. During this part of my journey I came across but one white man, and this was a Frenchman on his way north who came into the bungalow in which I had settled myself for the night. It belonged to a French teak company, of which he was a servant, and he seemed to look upon it as very natural that I, a stranger, should have made myself at home in it. He was cordial; there are few French in this business and the men, out in the jungle constantly to superintend the native labourer, live lives even more lonely than the English forest men, so that he was glad to have someone to talk to. We shared our dinner. He was a man of robust build, with a large, fleshy, red face and a warm voice that seemed to wrap his fluent words in a soft, rich fabric of sound. He had just come from short leave in Bangkok and, with the Frenchman's ingenuous belief that you are any more impressed by the number of his amours than by the number of his hats, talked much of the sexual experiences he had had there. He was a coarse fellow, ill-bred and stupid. But he caught sight of a torn, paper-bound book that was lying on the table.

"*Tiens*, where did you get hold of this?"

I told him that I had found it in the bungalow and had been glancing through it. It was that selection of Verlaine's poems which has for a frontispiece Carrière's misty but not uninteresting portrait of him.

"I wonder who the devil can have left it here," he said.

He took up the volume and idly fingering the pages told me various gross stories about the unhappy poet. They were not new to me. Then his eyes caught a line that he knew and he began to read.

*"Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches.
Et puis voici mon coeur qui ne bat que pour vous."*

And as he read his voice broke and tears came into his eyes and ran down his face.

"Ah, merde," he cried, "*ça me fait pleurer comme un veau.*"

He flung the book down and laughed and gave a little sob. I poured him out a drink of whisky, for there is nothing better than alcohol to still or at least to enable one to endure that particular heart-ache from which at the moment he was suffering. Then we played piquet. He went to bed early, since he had a long day before him and was starting at dawn, and by the time I got up he was gone. I did not see him again.

But as I rode along in the sunshine, bustling and quick like women gossiping at their spinning-wheels, I thought of him. I reflected that men are more interesting than books, but have this defect, that you cannot skip them; you have at least to skim the whole volume in order to find the good page. And you cannot put them on a shelf and take them down when you feel inclined; you must read them when the chance offers, like a book in a circulating library that is in such demand that you must take your turn and keep it no more than four-and-twenty hours. You may not be in the mood for them then or it may be that in your hurry you miss the only thing they had to give you.

And now the plain spread out with a noble spaciousness. The rice fields were no longer little patches laboriously wrested from the jungle, but broad acres. The days followed one another with a monotony in which there was withal something impressive. In the life of cities we are conscious but of fragments of days; they have no meaning of their own, but are merely parts of time in which we conduct such and such affairs; we begin them when they are already well on their way and continue them without regard to their natural end. But here they had completeness and one watched them unroll themselves with stately majesty from dawn to dusk; each day was like a flower, a rose that buds and blooms

and, without regret but accepting the course of nature, dies. And this vast sun-drenched plain was a fit scene for the pageant of that ever-recurring drama. The stars were like the curious who wander upon the scene of some great event, a battle or an earthquake, that has just occurred, first one by one timidly and then in bands, and stand about gaping or look for traces of what has passed.

The road became straight and level. Though here and there deep with ruts and when a stream crossed it muddy, great stretches could have been traversed by car. Now it is all very well to ride a pony at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles a day when you go along mountain paths, but when the road is broad and flat this mode of travel sorely tries your patience. It was six weeks now that I had been on the way. It seemed endless. Then on a sudden I found myself in the tropics. I suppose that little by little, as one uneventful day followed another, the character of the scene had been changing, but it had been so gradual that I had scarcely noticed it, and I drew a deep breath of delight when, riding into a village one noon, I was met, as by an unexpected friend, with the savour of the harsh, the impetuous, the flamboyant South. The depth of colour, the hot touch of the air on one's cheek, the dazzling, yet strangely veiled light, the different walk of the people, the lazy breadth of their gestures, the silence, the solemnity, the dust—this was the real thing and my jaded spirits rose. The village street was bordered by tamarinds and they were like the sentences of Sir Thomas Browne, opulent, stately, and self-possessed. In the compounds grew plantains, regal and bedraggled, and the crotons flaunted the riches of their sepulchral hues. The coconut trees with their dishevelled heads were like long, lean old men suddenly risen from sleep. In the monastery was a grove of areca palms and they stood, immensely tall and slender, with the gaunt precision and the bare, precise, and intellectual nakedness of a collection of apophthegms. It was the South.

We had now to get the day's journey over as early as possible and we started just as the first grey light stole into the Eastern sky. The sun rose and it was pleasantly warm on one's back, but in a little while it grew fierce and by ten it was overwhelming. It seemed to me that I had been riding along that broad white road since the beginning of time and still it stretched interminably before me. Then we arrived at a handsome village where the township officer, a neat Siamese, smiling and polite, offered to put me up in his own spacious house; and when he took me into his

compound I saw waiting for me, shaded by palm trees and diapered by the sun, red, substantial, reliable but unassuming—a Ford car. My journey was over. It ended without any flourish of trumpets, quietly, like the anti-climax of a play; and next morning, in the chilly dawn, leaving my mules and ponies with Kyuzaw, I started. The metal road was building and where it was impassable the Ford car took the bullock track; here and there we splashed through shallow streams. I was bumped and shaken and tossed from side to side; still, it was a road, a motor road, and sped along vertiginously at the rate of eight miles an hour. It was the first car in the history of man that had ever passed that way and the peasants in their fields looked at us in amaze. I wondered whether it occurred to any of them that in it they saw the symbol of a new life. It marked the end of an existence they had led since time immemorial. It heralded a revolution in their habits and their customs. It was change that came down upon them panting and puffing, with a slightly flattened tyre but blowing a defiant horn, Change.

And a little before sunset we arrived at the railhead. There was a new, gaily-painted rest-house at the station, and it might almost have been called a hotel. There was a bathroom, with a bath you could lie down in, and on the veranda long chairs in which you could loll. It was civilisation.

XXVII

I WAS within forty-eight hours by rail of Bangkok, but before going there I wanted to see Lopburi and Ayudha, which at one time were capitals of Siam. In these Eastern countries cities are founded, increase to greatness and are destroyed in a manner that cannot but fill the Western traveller, accustomed for many centuries now to a relative stability, with a certain misgiving. A king, forced by the hazards of war or maybe only to gratify a whim, will change his capital and, founding a new city, build a palace and temples and richly ornament them; and in a few generations, the seat of government owing to another hazard or another whim moving elsewhere, the city is abandoned and desolation usurps the place of so much transitory splendour. Here and there in the jungle, far from any habitation, you will find ruined temples, overgrown with trees, and among the dank verdure broken gods

and elaborate bas-reliefs as the only sign that here was once a thriving city, and you will come across poverty-stricken villages that are all that remain of the capital of a rich and powerful kingdom. It is a sombre reminder of the mutability of human things.

Lopburi is now but a narrow, winding street of Chinese houses, built along one bank of the river; but all about are the ruins of a great city, mouldering temples and crumbling pagodas with here and there a fragment of florid carving, and in the temples are broken images of the Blessed One, and in their courtyards bits of heads and arms and legs. The plaster is grey as though it had been discoloured by London fogs and it peels off the bricks so that you think of old men with loathsome diseases. There is no elegance of line in these ruins and the decoration of doors and windows, robbed by time of their gold and tinsel, is mean and tawdry.

But I had come to Lopburi chiefly to see what remained of the grand house of Constantine Faulkon, who was, I suppose, one of the most amazing of the adventurers who have made the East the scene of their exploits. The son of a Cephalonian innkeeper, he ran away to sea in an English ship, and after many hazards arriving in Siam rose to be the Chief Minister of the King. The world of his day rang with the tale of his unlimited power, splendour, and enormous wealth. There is an account of him in a little book by the Père d'Orléans of the Company of Jesus, but it is a work of edification and dilates unduly upon the tribulations of Constantine's widow when after his death she sought to preserve her virtue from the rude onslaughts of a Siamese prince. In her laudable efforts she was supported by her saintly grandmother, who at the age of eighty-eight, having lost nothing of the ardour and vivacity of her faith, talked to her continually of the famous martyrs of Japan, from whom she had the honour to be descended. *My daughter*, she said to her, *what glory there is in being a martyr! You have here the advantage that martyrdom seems to be an heirloom in your family: if you have so much reason to expect it, what pains should you not take to deserve it!*

It is satisfactory to learn that, sustained by these counsels and fortified by the incessant admonitions of the Jesuit Fathers, the widow resisted all temptations to become the bejewelled inmate of an almost royal seraglio and ended her virtuous days as dish-washer in the house of a gentleman of no social consequence.

One could have wished that the Père d'Orléans had been a little

more circumstantial in his account of his hero's career. The vicissitudes in the course of which he ascended from his lowly station to such a pinnacle surely deserved to be saved from oblivion. He represents him as a pious Catholic and an upright Minister devoted to the interests of his King; but his account of the revolution that overthrew both King and dynasty and delivered the Greek into the hands of the outraged patriots of Siam reads as though a certain arrangement of the facts had seemed necessary so that neither *le grand roi* nor various persons in high place should incur reproach. A decent veil is thrown over the suffering of the fallen favourite, but his death at the hands of the executioner is vastly edifying. Reading between the jejune lines you receive notwithstanding the impression of a powerful and brilliant character. Constantine Faulkon was unscrupulous, cruel, greedy, faithless, ambitious; but he was great. His story reads like one of Plutarch's lives.

But of the grand house which he built nothing remains but the high brick wall that surrounded it and three or four roofless buildings, crumbling walls, and the shapes of doors and windows. They have still the vague dignity of the architecture of Louis XIV. It is an unhandsome ruin that reminds you of nothing but a group of jerry-built villas destroyed by fire.

I went back to the river. It was narrow and turbid, deep between high banks, and on the other side were thick clumps of bamboo behind which the red sun was setting. The people were having their evening bath; fathers and mothers were bathing their children, and monks, having washed themselves, were rinsing out their yellow robes. It was a pleasant sight and grateful to the sensibility jarred by those sordid ruins and perplexed.

I have not the imagination to clothe dead bones with life nor the capacity to feel emotion over and over again about the same thing. I have known people who read *The Egoist* once a year and others who never go to Paris without having a look at Manet's *Olympe*. When once I have received from a work of art its peculiar thrill I have done with it till after the lapse of years, having become a different person, I can in *The Egoist* read a book I have never read before and in Manet's *Olympe* see a picture that has only just been hung in the Louvre. I had a notion that Ayudha would offer me nothing more than Lopburi and so made up my mind to give it a miss. Besides, I like my ease. I had gone from rest-house to rest-house long enough to hanker for the modest comfort of an Eastern hotel. I was getting a trifle tired of tinned sausages and

canned pears. I had neither had a letter nor seen a paper since I left Taunggyi and I thought with pleasure of the huge packet that must be awaiting me in Bangkok.

I determined to go there without lingering on the way. The train passed leisurely through wide and open country with jagged blue hills in the distance. There were rice fields on both sides of the line, as far as the eye could reach, but a good many trees, too, so that the landscape had a certain friendliness. The rice was in all stages of growth, from the young green shoots in little patches to the grain nearly ripe and yellowing in the sun. Here and there they were cutting it and sometimes you saw three or four peasants in line laden with great sheaves. I suppose that there is none of the staple foods of man that needs so much labour first to grow and then to prepare for consumption. In the stream by the side of the track buffaloes in herds, under the charge of a small boy or a bronzed, dwarfish man in a large hat, wallowed luxuriously. Little flocks of rice-birds flew white and shining, and sometimes grey cranes with outstretched necks. At the wayside stations there was always a crowd of idlers, and their *panaungs*, bright yellow, plum, or emerald-green, made lovely splashes of colour against the dust and the sunshine.

The train arrived at Ayudha. I was content to satisfy my curiosity about this historic place by a view of the railway-station (after all if a man of science can reconstruct a prehistoric animal from its thigh-bone why cannot a writer get as many emotions as he wants from a railway-station? In the Pennsylvania Depot is all the mystery of New York and in Victoria Station the grim, weary vastness of London), and with nonchalant eyes I put my head out of the carriage window. But a young man sprang to the door and opened it so promptly that I was nearly precipitated on to the platform. He wore a small round topee, a white drill coat, a black silk *panaung* so arranged as to make breeches, black silk stockings, and patent-leather pumps. He spoke voluble English. He had been sent to meet me, he said, and would show me everything there was to be seen at Ayudha; there was a launch waiting at the landing-stage to take me up and down the river; and he had ordered a carriage; and the rest-house had been swept and cleaned that morning; and he ended up:

"Everything in the garden is lovely."

He smiled at me with large flashing white teeth. A young man with a yellow face as smooth as a new plate, high cheek bones, and

very black gleaming eyes. I had not the heart then to tell him that I would not stay at Ayudha and indeed he gave me no time, for calling porters he told them to take my traps out of the carriage.

He took his duties seriously. He spared me nothing. From the station we walked along a broad street shaded with tamarind trees, on each side of which were Chinese shops, and the light was lovely and the people made attractive little pictures so that I would willingly have lingered; but my guide told me that there was nothing to see there, you had to go to Bangkok for shops, there they had everything you could buy in Europe; and with gentle determination led me to the landing-stage. We got into the launch. The river was broad and yellow. All along it were houseboats in which were shops, and above the muddy banks were houses on piles among fruit trees. My guide took me to a walled enclosure on the river bank where had been a royal palace, and in what might have been once a throne-room, for it was but a ruin, there was a royal bed and a royal chair and some fragments of carved wood. He showed me innumerable heads of Buddha in bronze and stone, which had been brought from Lopburi or excavated from the numerous wats of Ayudha. We walked along a road for a little and there waiting for us was a tiny carriage and an obstinate pony. What organisation! We drove for two or three miles, along a pleasantly shady road with peasants' houses on piles on each side of it and outside each gateway was a little paper pagoda stuck over with little white flags in order to preserve the inmates of the house from cholera. We came to a vast park, with its green glades and grassy clearings, a pleasant place to picnic in, and here were the remains of a palace and great temples, many ruined pagodas, and in one of the temples, deserted of all and lonely but indifferent, an enormous bronze figure of a sitting Buddha. Here and there under the trees children were playing. The little Siamese boys, with their wide eyes, curling hair, and roguish looks, were very pretty. In passing my guide pointed out to me a shrub with a pale violet flower. He told me that when you found it you might be sure that there were no tigers.

"You have no tigers in England," he laughed, not, I thought, without condescension.

I answered with deprecating modesty:

"No, we lead safe and peaceful lives in that tight little island. We are exposed to no dangers more alarming than the reckless-

ness of a drunken motorist or the fury of a woman scorned."

When we got back to the river I thanked the young Siamese warmly for showing me such interesting things and said that I would now go to the rest-house, upon which he opened his large gleaming eyes still larger and with his voice rising shrilly told me that I had not yet seen half of what he had to show me. I looked at him archly and murmured that enough was as good as a feast. He laughed brightly at this, evidently with the flattering belief that I had just invented the epigrammatic phrase, but floored me with the observation that enough was a purely relative term. I let him take me to another ruined temple, a scene untidy with desolation, and I gave an impatient glance at another Buddha of enormous size. And another and another. At last we came to a temple that was still a place of pilgrimage. I drew a breath of relief. It was like coming out of an unfurnished house to let, with its dead emptiness, into the busy street. At the landing-stage were women in sampans selling gold leaf, papers, and incense sticks. On each side of the walk that led to the temple were little tables on which were displayed the same wares and sweets and cakes besides, and the vendors were plying a busy trade. The chapel was not very large and it was almost filled with a gigantic image of the Blessed One, and as you walked up the steps and looked through the door (your eyes still dazzled by the sunlight) it was awe-inspiring to discern vaguely that enormous gilded figure looming out of the darkness. In front of him were large figures of two disciples and the altar table was covered with tawdry ornaments, with burning tapers, and with burning incense. In a corner was a large teak bed on which were sitting two monks, smoking the fat Siamese cigarettes, drinking tea, and chewing betel; they seemed not to notice the people who were there; some, men, women, and children, in order to acquire merit were applying gold leaf to the pediment, a gigantic lotus, on which the Buddha sat. One woman, a spare, middle-aged person with a thin, intelligent face, with genuflections and prayers was consulting fortune by means of large wooden beans, which she threw on the ground and which, by falling on their flat or their concave sides, answered her questions. There was an old man who came in with half a dozen members of his family and as soon as the middle-aged woman had finished with the beans he took them, and when after the prescribed rites he threw them on the ground the whole party watched anxiously. Having finished he lit a cigarette and the rest rose from their knees, but whether

the fates had promised good fortune or ill you could tell from not one of those impassive faces.

Now at last my guide took me to the rest-house that had been swept and cleaned for my visit. It was a houseboat with a narrow veranda looking on the river, a long sitting-room of dark wood and a bedroom and bathroom on each side. I very much liked the look of it. The young Siamese asked me to go to his house after dinner, saying he would ask his friends, but I told him I was tired, and with many expressions of goodwill he left me. The day was waning and, alone at last, sitting on the veranda I watched the traffic of the river. There were pedlars going along in their sampans with an easy stroke, pots and pans in their boats, vegetables for sale or food cooking in little stoves. Peasants passed me with a load of rice or an old woman with a shrivelled grey head paddling herself as unconcernedly in a tiny dugout as though she were walking along the street. The rest-house was at a bend of the river and the bank to which it was moored turned sharply; it was thick with mangoes and palms and arecas. The sun set and they were silhouetted against the redness of the sky: the areca with its bedraggled crown looks like a feather duster very much the worse for wear, but at night against the sapphire of the sky it has the distinction of a Persian miniature. With the last light of day a white flock of egrets, like haphazard thoughts that flit through the mind without reason or sequence, fluttered disorderly down the tranquil stream. Darkness fell and at first the houseboats on the other side of the broad river were bright with lights, but they went out one by one and only here and there was a red gleam reflected on the water. One by one the stars came out and the sky blazed with them. The traffic of the river ceased and only now and then did you hear the soft splash of a paddle as someone silently passed on his way home. When I awoke in the night I felt a faint motion as the houseboat rocked a little and heard a little gurgle of water, like the ghost of an Eastern music travelling not through space but through time. It was worth while for that sensation of exquisite peace, for the richness of that stillness, to have endured all that sight-seeing.

XXVIII

A FEW hours later I was in Bangkok.

It is impossible to consider these populous modern cities of the East without a certain malaise. They are all alike, with their straight streets, their arcades, their tramways, their dust, their blinding sun, their teeming Chinese, their dense traffic, their ceaseless din. They have no history and no traditions. Painters have not painted them. No poets, transfiguring dead bricks and mortar with their divine nostalgia, have given them a tremulous melancholy not their own. They live their own lives, without associations, like a man without imagination. They are hard and glittering and as unreal as a backcloth in a musical comedy. They give you nothing. But when you leave them it is with a feeling that you have missed something and you cannot help thinking that they have some secret that they have kept from you. And though you have been a trifle bored you look back upon them wistfully; you are certain that they have after all something to give you which, had you stayed longer or under other conditions, you would have been capable of receiving. For it is useless to offer a gift to him who cannot stretch out a hand to take it. But if you go back the secret still evades you and you ask yourself whether, after all, their only secret is not that the glamour of the East enwraps them. Because they are called Rangoon, Bangkok, or Saigon, because they are situated on the Irrawaddy, the Menam, or the Mekong, those great turbid rivers, they are invested with the magic spell that the ancient and storied East has cast upon the imaginative West. A hundred travellers may seek in them the answer to a question they cannot put and that yet torments them, only to be disappointed; a hundred travellers more will continue to press. And who can so describe a city as to give a significant picture of it? It is a different place to everyone who lives in it. No one can tell what it really is. Nor does it matter. The only thing of importance—to me—is what it means to me; and when the money-lender said, "You can 'ave Rome", he said all there was to be said, by him, about the Eternal City. Bangkok. I put my impressions on the table, as a gardener puts the varied flowers he has cut in a great heap, leaving them for you to arrange, and I ask myself what sort of pattern I can make out of them. For my impressions are like a long frieze, a vague tapestry, and my business is to find in it an elegant and at

the same time moving decoration. But the materials that are given me are dust and heat and noise and whiteness and more dust. The New Road is the main artery of the city, five miles long, and it is lined with houses, low and sordid, and shops, and the goods they sell, European and Japanese for the most part, look shop-soiled and dingy. A leisurely tram crowded with passengers passes down the whole length of the street, and the conductor never ceases to blow his horn. Gharries and rickshaws go up and down ringing their bells, and motors sounding their claxons. The pavements are crowded and there is a ceaseless clatter of the clogs the people wear. Clopperty-clop they go and it makes a sound as insistent and monotonous as the sawing of the cicadas in the jungle. There are Siamese. The Siamese, with short bristly hair, wearing the *panaung*, a wide piece of stuff which they tuck in to make baggy and comfortable breeches, are not a comely race, but old age gives them distinction; they grow thin, emaciated even, rather than fat, and grey rather than bald, and then their dark eyes peer brightly out of a ravaged, yellow, and wrinkled face; they walk well and uprightly, not from the knees as do most Europeans, but from the hips. There are Chinese, in trousers white, blue, or black, that come to just above the ankle, and they are innumerable. There are Arabs, tall and heavily bearded, with white hats and a hawk-like look; they walk with assurance, leisurely, and in their bold eyes you discern contempt for the race they exploit and pride in their own astuteness. There are turbaned natives of India with dark skins and the clean, sensitive features of their Aryan blood; as in all the East outside India, they seem deliberately alien and thread their way through the host as though they walked a lonely jungle path; their faces are the most inscrutable of all those inscrutable faces. The sun beats down and the road is white and the houses are white and the sky is white; there is no colour but the colour of dust and heat.

But if you turn out of the main road you will find yourself in a network of small streets, dark, shaded, and squalid, and tortuous alleys paved with cobble-stones. In numberless shops, open to the street, with their gay signs, the industrious Chinese ply the various crafts of an Oriental city. Here are druggists and coffin shops, money-changers and tea-houses. Along the streets, uttering the raucous cry of China, coolies lollop swiftly bearing loads and the peddling cook carries his little kitchen to sell you the hot dinner you are too busy to eat at home. You might be in Canton. Here

the Chinese live their lives apart and indifferent to the Western capital that the rulers of Siam have sought to make out of this strange, flat, confused city. What they have aimed at you see in the broad avenues, straight dusty roads sometimes running by the side of a canal, with which they have surrounded this conglomeration of sordid streets. They are handsome, spacious, and stately, shaded by trees, the deliberate adornment of a great city devised by a king ambitious to have an imposing seat; but they have no reality. There is something stagy about them, so that you feel they are more apt for court pageants than for the use of every day. No one walks in them. They seem to await ceremonies and processions. They are like the deserted avenues in the park of a fallen monarch.

XXIX

IT appears that there are three hundred and ninety wats in Bangkok. A wat is a collection of buildings used as a Buddhist monastery and it is surrounded by a wall, often crenellated so as to make a charming pattern, like the walled enclosure of a city. Each building has its own use. The main one is called a *bote*; it is a great and lofty hall, with a central nave generally and two aisles, and here the Buddha stands on his gilded platform. There is another building, very like the *bote*, called the *vihara* and distinguished from it by the fact that it is not surrounded by the sacred stones, which is used for feasts and ceremonies and assemblies of the common folk. The *bote*, and sometimes the *vihara*, is surrounded by a cloister. Then there are shelters, libraries, bell towers, and the priests' dwellings. Round the main buildings in due order are pagodas, large and small (they have their names, Phra Prang and Phra Chedi); some contain the ashes of royal or pious persons (it may be even of royal *and* pious persons) and some, merely decorative, serve only to acquire merit for those that built them.

But not by this list of facts (which I found in a book on the Architecture of Siam) can I hope to give an impression of the surprise, the stupefaction almost, which assailed me when I saw these incredible buildings. They are unlike anything in the world, so that you are taken aback, and you cannot fit them into the scheme of the things you know. It makes you laugh with delight to think that anything so fantastic could exist on this sombre

earth. They are gorgeous; they glitter with gold and whitewash, yet are not garish; against that vivid sky, in that dazzling sunlight, they hold their own, defying the brilliancy of nature and supplementing it with the ingenuity and the playful boldness of man. The artists who developed them step by step from the buildings of the ancient Khmers had the courage to pursue their fantasy to the limit; I fancy that art meant little to them, they desired to express a symbol; they knew no reticence, they cared nothing for good taste; and if they achieved art it is as men achieve happiness, not by pursuing it, but by doing with all their heart whatever in the day's work needs doing. I do not know that in fact they achieved art; I do not know that these Siamese wats have beauty, which they say is reserved and aloof and very refined; all I know is that they are strange and gay and odd, their lines are infinitely distinguished, like the lines of a proposition in a schoolboy's Euclid, their colours are flaunting and crude, like the colours of vegetables in the greengrocer's stall at an open-air market, and, like a place where seven ways meet, they open roads down which the imagination can make many a careless and unexpected journey.

The royal wat is not a wat but a city of wats; it is a gay, coloured confusion of halls and pagodas, some of them in ruins, some with the appearance of being brand-new; there are buildings, brilliant of hue though somewhat run to seed, that look like monstrous vegetables in the kitchen-gardens of the djinn; there are structures made of tiles and encrusted with strange tile flowers, three of them enormous, but many small ones, rows of them, that look like the prizes in a shooting-gallery at a village fair in the country of the gods. It is like a page of *Euphues* and you are tickled to death at the sesquipedalian fancy that invented so many sonorous, absurd, grandiloquent terms. It is a labyrinth in which you cannot find your way. Roof rises upon roof, and the roofs in Siamese architecture are its chief glory. They are arranged in three tiers, the upper one steeply pitched and the lower ones decreasing in angle as they descend. They are covered with glazed tiles and their red and yellow and green are a feast to the eye. The gables are framed with Narga, the sacred snake, its head at the lower eaves and its undulating body climbing up the slope of the roof to end in a horn at the apex; and the gables are decorated with reliefs in carved wood of Indra on the Elephant or Vishnu on the Garuda; for the temples of Buddha extend, without misgiving, shelter to the gods of other faiths. It is all incredibly rich with the gilding and the glass

mosaic of the architraves and door jambs and the black and gold lacquer of the doors and shutters.

It is huge, it is crowded, it dazzles the eyes and takes the breath away, it is empty, it is dead; you wander about a trifle disconsolate, for after all it means nothing to you, the "Oh" of surprise is extorted from you, but never the "Ah" of emotion wrung; it makes no sense; it is an intricacy of odd, archaic, and polysyllabic words in a crossword puzzle. And when in the course of your rambles you step up to look over a tall balustrade and see a rockery it is with relief that you enter. It is made about a small piece of artificial water, with little rustic bridges built over it here and there; it looks like the stony desert in which an ancient sage in a Chinese picture has his hermitage, and on the artificial rocks by the water's edge are monkeys and wild cats in stone and little dwarfish men. A magnolia grows there and a Chinese willow and shrubs with fat, shining leaves. It is a pleasantly fantastic retreat where an Oriental king might fitly meditate, in comfort and peace, on the transitoriness of compound things.

But there is another wat, Suthat by name, that gives you no such impression of pell-mell confusion. It is clean and well swept and empty and quiet, and the space and the silence make a significant decoration. In the cloisters, all round, sitting cheek by jowl are gilded Buddhas, and as night falls and they are left to undistracted meditation they are mysterious and vaguely sinister. Here and there in the court shrubs grow and stumpy, gnarled trees. There is a multitude of rooks and they caw loudly as they fly. The *bote* stands high on a double platform, and its whitewash is stained by the rain and burned by the sun to a mottled ivory. The square columns, fluted at the corners, slope slightly inwards, and their capitals are strange upspringing flowers like flowers in an enchanted garden. They give the effect of a fantastic filigree of gold and silver and precious gems, emeralds, rubies, and zircons. And the carving on the gable, intricate and elaborate, droops down like maidenhair in a grotto, and the climbing snake is like the waves of the sea in a Chinese painting. The doorways, three at each end and very tall, are of wood heavily carved and dully gilt, and the windows, close together and high, have shutters of faded gilt that faintly shines. With the evening, when the blue sky turns pink, the roof, the tall steep roof with its projecting eaves, gains all kinds of opalescent hues so that you can no longer believe it was made by human craftsmen, for it seems made of passing fancies

and memories and fond hopes. The silence and the solitude seem about to take shape and appear before your eyes. And now the wat is very tall and very slender and of an incredible elegance. But, alas, its spiritual significance escapes you.

XXX

IT seemed to me that there was more of this in the humble little monasteries that I had passed on the road hither. With their wooden walls and thatched roofs and their small tawdry images there was a homeliness about them, but withal an austerity, that seemed to suit the homely and yet austere religion that Gautama preached. It is, to my fancy, a religion of the countryside rather than of the cities and there lingers about it always the green shade of the wild fig tree under which the Blessed One found enlightenment. Legend has made him out to be the son of a king, so that when he renounced the world he might seem to have abandoned power and great riches and glory; but in truth he was no more than the scion of a good family of country gentlemen, and when he renounced the world I do not suppose he abandoned more than a number of buffaloes and some rice fields. His life was as simple as that of the headman of any of the villages I had passed through in the Shan States. He lived in a world that had a passion for metaphysical disquisition, but he did not take kindly to metaphysics and when he was forced by the subtle Hindu sages into argument he grew somewhat impatient. He would have nothing to do with speculations upon the origin, significance, and purpose of the Universe. "Verily," he said, "within this mortal body, some six feet high, but conscious and endowed with mind, is the world and its origin, and its passing away." His followers were forced by the Brahman doctors to defend their positions with metaphysical arguments and in course of time elaborated a theory of their faith that would satisfy the keen intelligence of a philosophic people, but Gautama, like all the founders of religion, had in point of fact but one thing to say: Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Most of the gods that the world has seen have made a somewhat frantic claim that men should have faith in them, and have threatened with dreadful penalties such as could not (whatever their goodwill) believe. There is something pathetic in the

violence with which they denounce those who thwart them in the bestowal of the great gifts they have to offer. They seem deep in their hearts to have felt that it was the faith of others that gave them divinity (as though, their godhead standing on an insecure foundation, every believer was as it were a stone to buttress it) and that the message they so ardently craved to deliver could only have its efficacy if they became god. And god they could only become if men believed in them. But Gautama made only the claim of the physician that you should give him a trial and judge him by results. He was more like the artist who does his work as best he can because to produce art is his function, and, having offered his gift to all that are willing and able to take it, passes on to other work, shrugging his shoulders tolerantly if his gift is declined.

Buddhism is a way of life rather than a religion. It is terribly austere. It is like an unknown sea when the day breaks as though it had never broken before and the colours of the morning steal over the earth as though for the first time and you, your bearings lost, with none to point the way, look with dismay upon the water's desert wastes. All is passing, said the Blessed One, all is sorrow, all is unreal; and he never ceased to insist on the transitoriness that embittered life.

But is it true that because things pass they are evil? For innumerable centuries moralists, divines, and poets have repined because of the transitoriness of created things. But is it not the better part of wisdom to see that change in itself is good? There is a story that Monet, the founder of the impressionists, being troubled with his eyes went to an oculist and trying on some spectacles cried, "Good heavens, with these I see the world just like Bouguereau." It is an instructive little anecdote. It is out of their limitations that men create beauty, and the new and lovely things that have been given to the world have been very often but the result of the conflict of the artist with his shortcomings. I hazard the suggestion that Richard Wagner would never have written the Ring if he had been able to compose as neat a tune as Verdi and that Cézanne would never have painted his exquisite pictures if he had been able to draw as well as the academic Ingres. And so with life. Everything changes, nothing remains in one stay, the rose that poured out its perfume on the air this morning is scattered this eve; and it is but good sense not to bewail this, the necessity of life, nor even to accept it with resignation, but to welcome it; it is the chief of the colours we have to work with, nay, it is the

canvas on which we paint, and shall we ignore it, shall we deplore it, shall we complain that it makes it impossible to complete our picture? Does the rose smell less sweet because in an hour it dies, is love less precious because it passes, is a song less lovely because we tire of it? If all things are transitory let us find delight in their transitoriness.

And that on the whole is what we of the West are at last learning to do. We welcome change for its own sake and because of the joy we take in it we have added a value to life. I think it is America that has taught us this lesson, and if that is so it is a greater benefit which that country has conferred upon the world than ragtime, cocktails, the phonograph, and the Pullman car.

But I do not suppose that anyone can wander through these Buddhist countries, Burma, the Shan States, and Siam, without being intrigued by the doctrine of Karma which is so inextricably interwoven with the habits, thoughts, and affections of the peoples with whom he is thrown in contact. It is commonly thought that it was invented by the Blessed One, but in fact it was current in India in his time and he did no more than adopt it with such modifications as were rendered necessary by his disbelief in the soul. For, as everyone knows, the most important point of the Buddha's teaching was that there was no such thing as a soul or a self. Every person is a putting together of qualities, material and mental; there can be no putting together without a becoming different, and there can be no becoming different without a passing away. Whatever has a beginning also has an end. The thought is exhilarating like a brisk winter morning when the sun shines and the road over the Downs is springy under the feet. Karma (I venture to remind the reader) is the theory that a man's actions in one existence determine his fate in the next. At death, under the influence of the desire of life, the impermanent aggregation of qualities which was a man reassembles to form another aggregation as impermanent. He is merely the present and temporary link in a long chain of cause and effect. The law of Karma prescribes that every act must have its result. It is the only explanation of the evil of this world that does not outrage the heart.

On a previous page I informed the kindly reader that it was my habit to start the day with a perusal of a few pages of a metaphysical work. It is a practice as healthy to the soul as the morning bath is healthy to the body. Though I have not the kind of intelligence that moves easily among abstractions and I often do

not altogether understand what I read (this does not too greatly distract me, since I find that professional dialecticians often complain that they cannot understand one another), I read on and sometimes come upon a passage that has a particular meaning for me. My way is lightened now and then by a happy phrase, for the philosophers of the past often wrote more than ordinarily well, and since in the long run a philosopher only describes himself, with his prejudices, his personal hopes, and his idiosyncrasies, and they were for the most part men of robust character, I have often the amusement of making acquaintance with a curious personality. In this desultory way I have read most of the great philosophers that the world has seen, trying to learn a little here and there or to get some enlightenment on matters that must puzzle everyone who makes his tentative way through the labyrinthine jungle of this life: nothing has interested me more than the way they treat the problem of evil. I cannot say that I have been greatly enlightened. The best of them have no more to say than that in the long run evil will be found to be good and that we who suffer must accept our suffering with an equal mind. In my perplexity I have read what the theologians had to say on the subject. After all, sin is their province and so far as they are concerned the question is simple: if God is good and all-powerful why does he permit evil? Their answers are many and confused; they satisfy neither the heart nor the head, and for my part—I speak of these things humbly because I am ignorant and it may be that though the plain man must ask the question the answer can only be understood by the expert—I cannot accept them.

Now it happened that one of the books I had brought to read on the way was Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*. I had read it before but had found it difficult and wanted to read it again, but since it was an unwieldy volume I tore off the binding and divided it into sections that I could conveniently put in my pocket when, having read enough, I mounted my pony and rode off from the bungalow in which I had passed the night. It is good reading, and though it scarcely convinces you it is often caustic, and the author has a pleasant gift of irony. He is never pompous. He handles the abstract with a light touch. But it is like one of those cubist houses in an exhibition, very light and trim and airy, but so severe in line and furnished with such austere taste that you cannot imagine yourself toasting your toes by the fire and lounging in an easy-chair with a comfortable book. But when I came upon his

treatment of the problem of evil I found myself as honestly scandalised as the Pope at the sight of a young woman's shapely calves. The Absolute, I read, is perfect, and evil, being but an appearance, cannot but subserve to the perfection of the whole. Error contributes to greater energy of life. Evil plays a part in a higher end and in this sense unknowingly is good. The Absolute is the richer for every discord. And my memory brought back to me, I know not why, a scene at the beginning of the war. It was in October and our sensibilities were not yet blunted. A cold, raw night. There had been what those who took part in it thought a battle, but which was so insignificant a skirmish that the papers did not so much as refer to it, and about a thousand men had been killed and wounded. They lay on straw on the floor of a country church, and the only light came from the candles on the altar. The Germans were advancing and it was necessary to evacuate them as quickly as possible. All through the night the ambulance cars, without lights, drove back and forth, and the wounded cried out to be taken, and some died as they were being lifted on to the stretchers and were thrown on the heap of dead outside the door, and they were dirty and gory, and the church stank of blood and the rankness of humanity. And there was one boy who was so shattered that it was not worth while to move him and as he lay there, seeing men on either side of him being taken out, he screamed at the top of his voice, "*Je ne veux pas mourir. Je suis trop jeune. Je ne veux pas mourir.*" And he went on screaming that he did not want to die till he died. Of course this is no argument. It was but an inconsiderable incident the only significance of which was that I saw it with my own eyes and in my ears for days afterwards rang that despairing cry, but a greater than I, a philosopher and a mathematician into the bargain if you please, said that the heart had its reasons which the head did not know, and (in the grip of compound things, to use the Buddhist phrase, as I am) this scene is to me a sufficient refutation of the metaphysician's fine-spun theories. But my heart can accept the evils that befall me if they are the consequence of actions that I (the I that is not my soul, which perishes, but the result of my deeds in another state of existence) did in past time, and I am resigned to the evils that I see about me, the death of the young (the most bitter of all), the grief of the mothers that bore them in anguish, poverty and sickness and frustrated hopes, if these evils are but the consequence of the sins which those that suffer them once committed. Here is an explana-

tion that outrages neither the heart nor the head; there is only one fault that I can find in it: it is incredible.

XXXI

THE hotel faced the river. My room was dark, one of a long line, with a veranda on each side of it; the breeze blew through, but it was stifling. The dining-room was large and dim, and for coolness' sake the windows were shuttered. One was waited on by silent Chinese boys. I did not know why, the insipid Eastern food sickened me. The heat of Bangkok was overwhelming. The wats oppressed me by their garish magnificence, making my head ache, and their fantastic ornaments filled me with malaise. All I saw looked too bright, the crowds in the street tired me, and the incessant din jangled my nerves. I felt very unwell, but I was not sure whether my trouble was bodily or spiritual (I am suspicious of the sensibility of the artist and I have often dissipated a whole train of exquisite and sombre thoughts by administering to myself a little liver pill), so to settle the matter I took my temperature. I was startled to see that it was a hundred and five. I could not believe it, so I took it again; it was still a hundred and five. No travail of the soul can cause anything like that. I went to bed and sent for a doctor. He told me that I had probably got malaria and took some of my blood to test; when he came back it was to say that there was no doubt about it and to give me quinine. I remembered then that towards the end of my journey down Siam the officer in command of the post had insisted that I should stay in his own house. He gave me his best bedroom and was so anxious that I should sleep in his grand European bed, of varnished pitch-pine and all the way from Bangkok, that I had not the heart to say that I preferred my own little camp-bed, which had a mosquito-net, to his, which had not. The anopheles snatched at the golden opportunity.

It was apparently a bad attack, since for some days the quinine had no effect on me, my temperature soared to those vertiginous heights that are common in malaria, and neither wet sheets nor ice packs brought it down. I lay there, panting and sleepless, and shapes of monstrous pagodas thronged my brain and great gilded Buddhas bore down on me. Those wooden rooms, with their verandas, made every sound frightfully audible to my tortured

ears and one morning I heard the manageress of the hotel, an amiable creature but a good woman of business, in her guttural German voice say to the doctor: "I can't have him die here, you know. You must take him to the hospital." And the doctor replied: "All right. But we'll wait a day or two yet." "Well, don't leave it too long," she replied.

Then the crisis came. The sweat poured from me so that soon my bed was soaking, as though I had had a bath in it, and well-being descended upon me. I could breathe easily. My head ached no longer. And then when they carried me on to a long chair and I was free from pain, I felt extraordinarily happy. My brain seemed wonderfully clear. I was as weak as a new-born child and for some days could do nothing but lie on the terrace at the back of the hotel and look at the river. Motor-launches bustled to and fro. The sampans were innumerable. Large steamers and sailing vessels came up the river so that it had quite the air of a busy port; and if you have a passion for travel it is impossible to look at the smallest, shabbiest, dirtiest sea-going tramp without a thrill of emotion and a hankering to be on it and on the way to some unknown haven. In the early morning, before the heat of the day, the scene was gay and lively; and then again towards sundown it was rich with colour and vaguely sinister with the laden shadows of the approaching night. I watched the steamers plod slowly up and with a noisy rattling of chains drop their anchors and I watched the three-masted barques drop silently down with the tide.

For some reason that I forget I had not been able to see the palace, but I did not regret it, since it thus retained for me the faint air of mystery which of all the emotions is that which you can least find in Bangkok. It is surrounded by a great white wall, strangely crenellated, and the crenellations have the effect of a row of lotus buds. At intervals are gateways at which stand guards in odd Napoleonic costumes, and they have a pleasantly operatic air so that you expect them at any minute to break into florid song. Towards evening the white wall becomes pink and translucent, and then above it, the dusk shrouding their garishness with its own soft glamour, you see, higgledy-piggledy, the gay, fantastic, and multicoloured roofs of the palace and the wats and the bright-hued tapering of the pagodas. You divine wide courtyards, with lovely gateways intricately decorated, in which officials of the court, in their sober but distinguished dress, are intent upon secret affairs;

and you imagine walks lined with trim, clipped trees and temples sombre and magnificent, throne-halls rich with gold and precious stones, and apartments, vaguely scented, dark and cool, in which lie in careless profusion the storied treasures of the East.

And because I had nothing to do except look at the river and enjoy the weakness that held me blissfully to my chair I invented a fairy-story. Here it is.

XXXII

FIRST the King of Siam had two daughters and he called them Night and Day. Then he had two more, so he changed the names of the first ones and called the four of them after the seasons, Spring and Autumn, Winter and Summer. But in course of time he had three others, and he changed their names again and called all seven by the days of the week. But when his eighth daughter was born he did not know what to do till he suddenly thought of the months of the year. The Queen said there were only twelve and it confused her to have to remember so many new names, but the King had a methodical mind and when he made it up he never could change if it he tried. He changed the names of all his daughters and called them January, February, March (though of course in Siamese), till he came to the youngest, who was called August, and the next one was called September.

"That only leaves October, November, and December," said the Queen. "And after that we shall have to begin all over again."

"No, we shan't," said the King, "because I think twelve daughters are enough for any man and after the birth of dear little December I shall be reluctantly compelled to cut off your head."

He cried bitterly when he said this, for he was extremely fond of the Queen. Of course it made the Queen very uneasy, because she knew that it would distress the King very much if he had to cut off her head. And it would not be very nice for her. But it so happened that there was no need for either of them to worry, because September was the last daughter they ever had. The Queen only had sons after that and they were called by the letters of the alphabet, so there was no cause for anxiety there for a long time, since she had only reached the letter J.

Now the King of Siam's daughters had had their characters permanently embittered by having to change their names in this way, and the older ones, whose names of course had been changed oftener than the others, had their characters more permanently embittered. But September, who had never known what it was to be called anything but September (except of course by her sisters, who because their characters were embittered called her all sorts of names), had a very sweet and charming nature.

The King of Siam had a habit which I think might be usefully imitated in Europe. Instead of receiving presents on his birthday he gave them, and it looks as though he liked it, for he used often to say he was sorry he had only been born on one day and so only had one birthday in the year. But in this way he managed in course of time to give away all his wedding presents and the loyal addresses which the mayors of the cities in Siam presented him with and all his old crowns which had gone out of fashion. One year on his birthday, not having anything else handy, he gave each of his daughters a beautiful green parrot in a beautiful golden cage. There were nine of them and on each cage was written the name of the month which was the name of the princess it belonged to. The nine Princesses were very proud of their parrots and they spent an hour every day (for like their father they were of a methodical turn of mind) in teaching them to talk. Presently all the parrots could say "God Save the King" (in Siamese, which is very difficult) and some of them could say "Pretty Polly" in no less than seven Oriental languages. But one day when the Princess September went to say good morning to her parrot she found it lying dead at the bottom of its golden cage. She burst into a flood of tears, and nothing that her Maids of Honour could say comforted her. She cried so much that the Maids of Honour, not knowing what to do, told the Queen, and the Queen said it was stuff and nonsense and the child had better go to bed without any supper. The Maids of Honour wanted to go to a party, so they put the Princess September to bed as quickly as they could and left her by herself. And while she lay in her bed, crying still even though she felt rather hungry, she saw a little bird hop into her room. She took her thumb out of her mouth and sat up. Then the little bird began to sing, and he sang a beautiful song all about the lake in the King's garden and the willow trees that looked at themselves in the still water and the gold fish that glided in and out of the branches that were reflected in it. When he had

finished, the Princess was not crying any more and she quite forgot that she had had no supper.

"That was a very nice song," she said.

The little bird gave her a bow, for artists have naturally good manners and they like to be appreciated.

"Would you care to have me instead of your parrot?" said the little bird. "It's true that I'm not so pretty to look at, but on the other hand I have a much better voice."

The Princess September clapped her hands with delight and then the little bird hopped on to the end of her bed and sang her to sleep.

When she awoke next day the little bird was still sitting there, and as she opened her eyes he said good morning. The Maids of Honour brought in her breakfast, and he ate rice out of her hand and he had his bath in her saucer. He drank out of it too. The Maids of Honour said they didn't think it was very polite to drink one's bath water, but the Princess September said that was the artistic temperament. When he had finished his breakfast he began to sing again so beautifully that the Maids of Honour were quite surprised, for they had never heard anything like it, and the Princess September was very proud and happy.

"Now I want to show you to my eight sisters," said the princess.

She stretched out the first finger of her right hand so that it served as a perch and the little bird flew down and sat on it. Then, followed by her Maids of Honour, she went through the palace and called on each of the Princesses in turn, starting with January, for she was mindful of etiquette, and going all the way down to August. And for each of the Princesses the little bird sang a different song. But the parrots could only say "God save the King" and "Pretty Polly". At last she showed the little bird to the King and Queen. They were surprised and delighted.

"I knew I was right to send you to bed without any supper," said the Queen.

"This bird sings much better than the parrots," said the King.

"I should have thought you got quite tired of hearing people say 'God save the King'," said the Queen. "I can't think why those girls wanted to teach their parrots to say it too."

"The sentiment is admirable," said the King, "and I never mind how often I hear it. But I do get tired of hearing those parrots say 'Pretty Polly'."

"They say it in seven different languages," said the Princesses.

"I dare say they do," said the King, "but it reminds me too much of my councillors. They say the same thing in seven different ways and it never means anything in any way they say it."

The Princesses, their characters as I have already said being naturally embittered, were vexed at this, and the parrots looked very glum indeed. But the Princess September ran through all the rooms of the palace, singing like a lark, while the little bird flew round and round her, singing like a nightingale, which indeed it was.

Things went on like this for several days and then the eight Princesses put their heads together. They went to September and sat down in a circle round her, hiding their feet as is proper for Siamese Princesses to do.

"My poor September," they said. "We are sorry for the death of your beautiful parrot. It must be dreadful for you not to have a pet bird as we have. So we have all put our pocket-money together and we are going to buy you a lovely green and yellow parrot."

"Thank you for nothing," said September. (This was not very civil of her, but Siamese princesses are sometimes a little short with one another.) "I have a pet bird which sings the most charming songs to me and I don't know what on earth I should do with a green and yellow parrot."

January sniffed, then February sniffed, then March sniffed: in fact all the Princesses sniffed, but in their proper order of precedence. When they had finished, September asked them:

"Why do you sniff? Have you all got colds in the head?"

"Well, my dear," they said, "it's absurd to talk of *your* bird when the little fellow flies in and out just as he likes." They looked round the room and raised their eyebrows so high that their foreheads entirely disappeared.

"You'll get dreadful wrinkles," said September.

"Do you mind our asking where your bird is now?" they said.

"He's gone to pay a visit to his father-in-law," said the Princess September.

"And what makes you think he'll come back?" asked the Princesses.

"He always does come back," said September.

"Well, my dear," said the eight Princesses, "if you'll take our advice you won't run any risks like that. If he comes back, and,

mind you, if he does you'll be lucky, pop him into the cage and keep him there. That's the only way you can be sure of him."

"But I like to have him fly about the room," said the Princess September.

"Safety first," said her sisters ominously.

They got up and walked out of the room, shaking their heads, and they left September very uneasy. It seemed to her that her little bird was away a long time and she could not think what he was doing. Something might have happened to him. What with hawks and men with snares you never knew what trouble he might get into. Besides, he might forget her, or he might take a fancy to somebody else; that would be dreadful; oh, she wished he were safely back again, and in the golden cage that stood there empty and ready. For when the Maids of Honour had buried the dead parrot they had left the cage in its old place.

Suddenly September heard a tweet-tweet just behind her ear and she saw the little bird sitting on her shoulder. He had come in so quietly and alighted so softly that she had not heard him.

"I wondered what on earth had become of you," said the Princess.

"I thought you'd wonder that," said the little bird. "The fact is I very nearly didn't come back to-night at all. My father-in-law was giving a party and they all wanted me to stay, but I thought you'd be anxious."

Under the circumstances this was a very unfortunate remark for the little bird to make.

September felt her heart go thump, thump, against her chest, and she made up her mind to take no more risks. She put up her hand and took hold of the bird. This he was quite used to: she liked feeling his heart go pit-a-pat, so fast, in the hollow of her hand, and I think he liked the soft warmth of her little hand. So the bird suspected nothing, and he was so surprised when she carried him over to the cage, popped him in, and shut the door on him that for a moment he could think of nothing to say. But in a moment or two he hopped up on the ivory perch and said:

"What is the joke?"

"There's no joke," said September, "but some of mamma's cats are prowling about to-night, and I think you're much safer in there."

"I can't think why the Queen wants to have all those cats," said the little bird, rather crossly.

"Well, you see, they're very special cats," said the Princess, "they have blue eyes and a kink in their tails. and they're a speciality of the Royal Family, if you understand what I mean."

"Perfectly," said the little bird, "but why did you put me in this cage without saying anything about it? I don't think it's the sort of place I like."

"I shouldn't have slept a wink all night if I hadn't known you were safe."

"Well, just for this once I don't mind," said the little bird, "so long as you let me out in the morning."

He ate a very good supper and then began to sing. But in the middle of his song he stopped.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," he said, "but I don't feel like singing to-night."

"Very well," said September, "go to sleep instead."

So he put his head under his wing and in a minute was fast asleep. September went to sleep too. But when the dawn broke she was awakened by the little bird calling her at the top of his voice.

"Wake up, wake up," he said. "Open the door of this cage and let me out. I want to have a good fly while the dew is still on the ground."

"You're much better off where you are," said September. "You have a beautiful golden cage. It was made by the best workman in my papa's kingdom, and my papa was so pleased with it that he cut off his head so that he should never make another."

"Let me out, let me out," said the little bird.

"You'll have three meals a day served by my Maids of Honour; you'll have nothing to worry you from morning till night, and you can sing to your heart's content."

"Let me out, let me out," said the little bird. And he tried to slip through the bars of the cage, but of course he couldn't, and he beat against the door, but of course he couldn't open it. Then the eight Princesses came in and looked at him. They told September she was very wise to take their advice. They said he would soon get used to the cage and in a few days would quite forget that he had ever been free. The little bird said nothing at all while they were there, but as soon as they were gone he began to cry again: "Let me out, let me out."

"Don't be such an old silly," said September. "I've only put you in the cage because I'm so fond of you. I know what's good

for you much better than you do yourself. Sing me a little song and I'll give you a piece of brown sugar."

But the little bird stood in the corner of his cage, looking out at the blue sky, and never sang a note. He never sang all day.

"What's the good of sulking?" said September. "Why don't you sing and forget your troubles?"

"How can I sing?" answered the bird. "I want to see the trees and the lake and the green rice growing in the fields."

"If that's all you want I'll take you for a walk," said September.

She picked up the cage and went out and she walked down to the lake round which grew the willow trees, and she stood at the edge of the rice fields that stretched as far as the eye could see.

"I'll take you out every day," she said. "I love you and I only want to make you happy."

"It's not the same thing," said the little bird. "The rice fields and the lake and the willow trees look quite different when you see them through the bars of a cage."

So she brought him home again and gave him his supper. But he wouldn't eat a thing. The Princess was a little anxious at this, and asked her sisters what they thought about it.

"You must be firm," they said.

"But if he won't eat, he'll die," she answered.

"That would be very ungrateful of him," they said. "He must know that you're only thinking of his own good. If he's obstinate and dies it'll serve him right and you'll be well rid of him."

September didn't see how that was going to do *her* very much good, but they were eight to one and all older than she, so she said nothing.

"Perhaps he'll have got used to his cage by to-morrow," she said.

And next day when she awoke she cried out good morning in a cheerful voice. She got no answer. She jumped out of bed and ran to the cage. She gave a startled cry, for there the little bird lay, at the bottom, on his side, with his eyes closed, and he looked as if he were dead. She opened the door and putting her hand in lifted him out. She gave a sob of relief, for she felt that his little heart was beating still.

"Wake up, wake up, little bird," she said.

She began to cry and her tears fell on the little bird. He opened his eyes and felt that the bars of the cage were no longer round him.

"I cannot sing unless I'm free and if I cannot sing, I die," he said.

The Princess gave a great sob.

"Then take your freedom," she said. "I shut you in a golden cage because I loved you and wanted to have you all to myself. But I never knew it would kill you. Go. Fly away among the trees that are round the lake and fly over the green rice fields. I love you enough to let you be happy in your own way."

She threw open the window and gently placed the little bird on the sill. He shook himself a little.

"Come and go as you will, little bird," she said. "I will never put you in a cage any more."

"I will come because I love you, little Princess," said the bird. "And I will sing you the loveliest songs I know. I shall go far away, but I shall always come back, and I shall never forget you." He gave himself another shake. "Good gracious me, how stiff I am," he said.

Then he opened his wings and flew right away into the blue. But the little Princess burst into tears, for it is very difficult to put the happiness of someone you love before your own, and with her little bird far out of sight she felt on a sudden very lonely. When her sisters knew what had happened they mocked her and said that the little bird would never return. But he did at last. And he sat on September's shoulder and ate out of her hand and sang her the beautiful songs he had learned while he was flying up and down the fair places of the world. September kept her window open day and night so that the little bird might come into her room whenever he felt inclined, and this was very good for her; so she grew extremely beautiful. And when she was old enough she married the King of Cambodia and was carried all the way to the city in which he lived on a white elephant. But her sisters never slept with their windows open, so they grew extremely ugly as well as disagreeable, and when the time came to marry them off they were given away to the King's councillors with a pound of tea and a Siamese cat.

XXXIII

WHEN I was strong enough a kind friend, manager of the B.A.T., took me in his company's launch to see the klongs, or canals, which give Bangkok its individuality. It appears that

until a few years ago no one was allowed without the royal permission to build on land and the houses stood on piles driven into the mud banks at the water's edge or were constructed on floating pontoons moored to the side. The Menam, broad and handsome, is the city's main highway. Going up it, you pass wats placed advantageously here and there along the banks; and the high wall of the palace with the crowded splendour of the buildings behind it; public buildings, very grand and new; the trim, green, old-fashioned, and dignified British Legation, and then untidy wharves. You turn down into one of the main klongs, the Oxford Street of Bangkok, and on each side are houseboats on which are shops open to the river-front, and people go about making their purchases in sampans. Some of the canals are so broad that pontoons are moored in mid-stream and thus make a double or a treble row of shops. Little steamers, the omnibuses of the thrifty, puff up and down quickly, crowded with passengers; and as the rich in their great cars splash the passers-by on a rainy day in London, so opulent Chinamen in motor-launches speed along with a wash that makes the tiny dugouts rock dangerously. Great barges are rowed slowly up and down, laden with wares, and these are the horse-drawn wagons that carry goods to market or from the wholesale merchant to the shopkeeper. Then there are the pedlars, like street-hawkers with a push-cart, who go about in little boats with their fish, their meat, or their vegetables. A woman, sitting under a yellow umbrella of oiled paper, paddles them along with a firm and easy stroke. Finally there are the pedestrians, single persons in a sampan who paddle to and fro bent on some errand or idly as one might take a stroll down Piccadilly. To unaccustomed eyes it is surprising to see a decent old woman with a mop of grey hair deftly manœuvring her canoe amid the traffic as she goes methodically about her day's shopping. And like children scampering across the road tiny boys and girls, sometimes stark naked and seldom with more than a rag round their loins, dart in and out among the steamers and motor-boats in tiny little dugouts so that you wonder that they are not run down. On the houseboats people lounge about idly; men mostly half-naked wash themselves or their children, and here and there half a dozen urchins scramble about in the water.

And as you pass down a klong you get a sight of little creeks running out of it, only large enough for a sampan to enter, and you have a glimpse of green trees and houses sheltering amongst

them. They are like the secluded courts and alleys that you find in London leading out of a busy thoroughfare. And, just as the main street of a large town winds into a suburban road, the klong narrows, the traffic dwindles, and now there is but one houseboat here and there, as it might be a general store to provide for the varied wants of the neighbours; and then the trees on the banks grow thick, coconuts and fruit trees, and you come but now and then upon a little brown house, the home of some Siamese who does not fear solitude. The plantations grow more extensive and your klong, which first was a busy street, then a respectable road through the suburbs, now becomes a leafy country lane.

XXXIV

I LEFT Bangkok on a shabby little boat of four or five hundred tons. The dingy saloon, which served also as dining-room, had two narrow tables down its length with swivel-chairs on both sides of them. The cabins were in the bowels of the ship and they were extremely dirty. Cockroaches walked about on the floor and however placid your temperament it is difficult not to be startled when you go to the wash-basin to wash your hands and a huge cockroach stalks leisurely out.

We dropped down the river, broad and lazy and smiling, and its green banks were dotted with little huts on piles standing at the water's edge. We crossed the bar; and the open sea, blue and still, spread before me. The look of it and the smell of it filled me with elation.

I had gone on board early in the morning and soon discovered that I was thrown amid the oddest collection of persons I had ever encountered. There were two French traders and a Belgian colonel, an Italian tenor, the American proprietor of a circus with his wife, and a retired French official with his. The circus proprietor was what is termed a good mixer, a type which according to your mood you fly from or welcome, but I happened to be feeling much pleased with life and before I had been on board an hour we had shaken for drinks, and he had shown me his animals. He was a very short, fat man and his stingah-shifter, white but none too clean, outlined the noble proportions of his abdomen, but the collar was so tight that you wondered he did not choke. He had a red, clean-shaven face, a merry blue eye, and short, untidy sandy

hair. He wore a battered topee well on the back of his head. His name was Wilkins and he was born in Portland, Oregon. It appears that the Oriental has a passion for the circus and Mr. Wilkins for twenty years had been travelling up and down the East from Port Said to Yokohama (Aden, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Penang, Bangkok, Saigon, Hué, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Shanghai, their names roll on the tongue savourily, crowding the imagination with sunshine and strange sounds and a multicoloured activity) with his menagerie and his merry-go-rounds. It was a strange life he led, unusual and one that, one would have thought, must offer the occasion for all sorts of curious experiences, but the odd thing about him was that he was a perfectly commonplace little man and you would have been prepared to find him running a garage or keeping a third-rate hotel in a second-rate town in California. The fact is, and I have noticed it so often that I do not know why it should always surprise me, that the extraordinariness of a man's life does not make him extraordinary, but contrariwise if a man is extraordinary he will make extraordinariness out of a life as humdrum as that of a country curate. I wish I could feel it reasonable to tell here the story of the hermit I went to see on an island in the Torres Straits, a shipwrecked mariner who had lived there alone for thirty years, but when you are writing a book you are imprisoned by the four walls of your subject, and though for the entertainment of my own digressing mind I set it down now I should be forced in the end, by my sense of what is fit to go between two covers and what is not, to cut it out. Anyhow, the long and short of it is that notwithstanding this long and intimate communion with nature and his thoughts the man was as dull, insensitive, and vulgar an oaf at the end of his experience as he must have been at the beginning.

The Italian singer passed us and Mr. Wilkins told me that he was a Neapolitan who was on his way to Hong Kong to rejoin his company, which he had been forced to leave owing to an attack of malaria in Bangkok. He was an enormous fellow, and very fat, and when he flung himself into a chair it creaked with dismay. He took off his topee, displaying a great head of long, curly, greasy hair, and ran podgy and beringed fingers through it.

"He ain't very sociable," said Mr. Wilkins. "He took the cigar I gave him, but he wouldn't have a drink. I shouldn't wonder if there wasn't somethin' rather queer about him. Nasty-lookin' guy, ain't he?"

Then a little fat woman in white came on deck holding by the hand a Wa-Wa monkey. It walked solemnly by her side.

"This is Mrs. Wilkins," said the circus proprietor, "and our youngest son. Draw up a chair, Mrs. Wilkins, and meet this gentleman. I don't know his name, but he's already paid for two drinks for me and if he can't shake any better than he has yet he'll pay for one for you too."

Mrs. Wilkins sat down with an abstracted, serious look, and with her eyes on the blue sea suggested that she did not see why she shouldn't have a lemonade.

"My, it's hot," she murmured, fanning herself with the topee which she took off.

"Mrs. Wilkins feels the heat," said her husband. "She's had twenty years of it now."

"Twenty-two and a half," said Mrs. Wilkins, still looking at the sea.

"And she's never got used to it yet."

"Nor never shall and you know it," said Mrs. Wilkins.

She was just the same size as her husband and just as fat, and she had a round red face like his and the same sandy, untidy hair. I wondered if they had married because they were so exactly alike, or if in the course of years they had acquired this astonishing resemblance. She did not turn her head but continued to look absently at the sea.

"Have you shown him the animals?" she asked.

"You bet your life I have."

"What did he think of Percy?"

"Thought him fine."

I could not but feel that I was being unduly left out of a conversation of which I was at all events partly the subject, so I asked:

"Who's Percy?"

"Percy's our eldest son. There's a flyin'-fish, Elmer. He's the oran-utan. Did he eat his food well this morning?"

"Fine. He's the biggest oran-utan in captivity. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for him."

"And what relation is the elephant?" I asked.

Mrs. Wilkins did not look at me, but with her blue eyes still gazed indifferently at the sea.

"He's no relation," she answered. "Only a friend."

The boy brought lemonade for Mrs. Wilkins, a whisky and soda

for her husband and a gin and tonic for me. We shook dice and I signed the chit.

"It must come expensive if he always loses when he shakes," Mrs. Wilkins murmured to the coast-line.

"I guess Egbert would like a sip of your lemonade, my dear," said Mr. Wilkins.

Mrs. Wilkins slightly turned her head and looked at the monkey sitting on her lap.

"Would you like a sip of mother's lemonade, Egbert?"

The monkey gave a little squeak and putting her arm round him she handed him a straw. The monkey sucked up a little lemonade and having drunk enough sank back against Mrs. Wilkins's ample bosom.

"Mrs. Wilkins thinks the world of Egbert," said her husband. "You can't wonder at it, he's her youngest."

Mrs. Wilkins took another straw and thoughtfully drank her lemonade.

"Egbert's all right," she remarked. "There's nothin' wrong with Egbert."

Just then the French official, who had been sitting down, got up and began walking up and down. He had been accompanied on board by the French Minister at Bangkok, one or two secretaries, and a Prince of the Royal Family. There had been a great deal of bowing and shaking of hands and as the boat slipped away from the quay much waving of hats and handkerchiefs. He was evidently a person of consequence. I had heard the Captain address him as Monsieur le Gouverneur.

"That's the big noise on this boat," said Mr. Wilkins. "He was Governor of one of the French colonies and now he's makin' a tour of the world. He came to see my circus at Bangkok. I guess I'll ask him what he'll have. What shall I call him, my dear?"

Mrs. Wilkins slowly turned her head and looked at the Frenchman, with the rosette of the Legion of Honour in his button-hole, pacing up and down.

"Don't call him anythin'," she said. "Show him a hoop and he'll jump right through it."

I could not but laugh. Monsieur le Gouverneur was a little man, well below the average height and small made, with a very ugly little face and thick, almost negroid features; and he had a bushy grey head, bushy grey eyebrows and a bushy grey moustache. He did look a little like a poodle and he had the poodle's soft,

intelligent, and shining eyes. Next time he passed us Mr. Wilkins called out:

"Monsoo. *Qu'est ce que vous prenez?*" I cannot reproduce the eccentricities of his accent. "*Une petite verre de porto.*" He turned to me. "Foreigners, they all drink porto. You're always safe with that."

"Not the Dutch," said Mrs. Wilkins, with a look at the sea. "They won't touch nothin' but Schnapps."

The distinguished Frenchman stopped and looked at Mr. Wilkins with some bewilderment. Whereupon Mr. Wilkins tapped his breast and said:

"Moa, *propriétaire Cirque. Vous avez visité.*"

Then, for a reason that escaped me, Mr. Wilkins made his arms into a hoop and outlined the gestures that represented a poodle jumping through it. Then he pointed at the Wa-Wa that Mrs. Wilkins was still holding on her lap.

"*La petit fils de mon femme,*" he said.

Light broke upon the Governor and he burst into a peculiarly musical and infectious laugh. Mr. Wilkins began laughing too.

"*Oui, oui,*" he cried. "Moa, circus proprietor. *Une petite verre de porto. Oui. Oui. N'est ce pas?*"

"Mr. Wilkins talks French like a Frenchman," Mrs. Wilkins informed the passing sea.

"*Mais très volontiers,*" said the Governor, still smiling. I drew him up a chair and he sat down with a bow to Mrs. Wilkins.

"Tell poodle-face his name's Egbert," she said, looking at the sea.

I called the boy and we ordered a round of drinks.

"You sign the chit, Elmer," she said. "It's not a bit of good Mr. What's-his-name shakin' if he can't shake nothin' better than a pair of treys."

"*Vous comprenez le français, madame?*" asked the Governor politely.

"He wants to know if you speak French, my dear."

"Where does he think I was raised? Naples?"

Then the Governor, with exuberant gesticulation, burst into a torrent of English so fantastic that it required all my knowledge of French to understand what he was talking about.

Presently Mr. Wilkins took him down to look at his animals and a little later we assembled in the stuffy saloon for luncheon. The Governor's wife appeared and was put on the captain's right.

The Governor explained to her who we all were and she gave us a gracious bow. She was a large woman, tall and of a robust build, of fifty-five perhaps, and she was dressed somewhat severely in black silk. On her head she wore a huge round topee. Her features were so large and regular, her form so statuesque, that you were reminded of the massive females who take part in processions. She would have admirably suited the role of Columbia or Britannia in a patriotic demonstration. She towered over her diminutive husband like a skyscraper over a shack. He talked incessantly, with vivacity and wit, and when he said anything amusing her heavy features relaxed into a large, fond smile.

"*Que tu es bête, mon ami,*" she said. She turned to the captain. "You must not pay any attention to him. He is always like that."

We had indeed a very amusing meal and when it was over we separated to our various cabins to sleep away the heat of the afternoon. On such a small boat, having once made the acquaintance of my fellow-passengers, it would have been impossible, even had I wished it, not to pass with them every moment of the day that I was not in my cabin. The only person who held himself aloof was the Italian tenor. He spoke to no one, but sat by himself as far forward as he could get, twanging a guitar in an undertone so that you had to strain your ears to catch the notes. We remained in sight of land and the sea was like a pail of milk. Talking of one thing and another we watched the day decline, we dined, and then we sat out again on deck under the stars. The two traders played piquet in the hot saloon, but the Belgian colonel joined our little group. He was shy and fat and opened his mouth only to utter a civility. Soon, influenced perhaps by the night and encouraged by the darkness that gave him, up there in the bows, the sensation of being alone with the sea, the Italian tenor, accompanying himself on his guitar, began to sing, first in a low tone, and then a little louder, till presently, his music captivating him, he sang with all his might. He had the real Italian voice, all macaroni, olive oil, and sunshine, and he sang the Neapolitan songs that I had heard in my youth in the Piazza San Ferdinando, and fragments from *La Bohème*, and *Traviata* and *Rigoletto*. He sang with emotion and false emphasis and his tremolo reminded you of every third-rate Italian tenor you had ever heard, but there in the openness of that lovely night his exaggerations only made you smile and you could not but feel in your heart a lazy, sensual pleasure. He sang for an

hour, perhaps, and we all fell silent; then he was still, but he did not move and we saw his huge bulk dimly outlined against the luminous sky.

I saw that the little French Governor had been holding the hand of his large wife and the sight was absurd and touching.

"Do you know that this is the anniversary of the day on which I first saw my wife," he said, suddenly breaking the silence which had certainly weighed on him, for I had never met a more loquacious creature. "It is also the anniversary of the day on which she promised to be my wife. And, which will surprise you, they were one and the same."

"Voyons, *mon ami*," said the lady, "you are not going to bore our friends with that old story. You are really quite insupportable."

But she spoke with a smile on her large, firm face, and in a tone that suggested that she was quite willing to hear it again.

"But it will interest them, *mon petit chou*." It was in this way that he always addressed his wife and it was funny to hear this imposing and even majestic lady thus addressed by her small husband. "Will it not, *monsieur*?" he asked me. "It is a romance, and who does not like romance, especially on such a night as this?"

I assured the Governor that we were all anxious to hear, and the Belgian colonel took the opportunity once more to be polite.

"You see, ours was a marriage of convenience pure and simple."

"C'est vrai," said the lady. "It would be stupid to deny it. But sometimes love comes after marriage and not before, and then it is better. It lasts longer."

I could not but notice that the Governor gave her hand an affectionate little squeeze.

"You see, I had been in the navy, and when I retired I was forty-nine. I was strong and active and I was very anxious to find an occupation. I looked about; I pulled all the strings I could. Fortunately I had a cousin who had some political importance. It is one of the advantages of democratic government that if you have sufficient influence, merit, which otherwise might pass unnoticed, generally receives its due reward."

"You are modesty itself, *mon pauvre ami*," said she.

"And presently I was sent for by the Minister to the Colonies and offered the post of Governor in a certain colony. It was a very distant spot that they wished to send me to and a lonely one, but

I had spent my life wandering from port to port, and that was not a matter that troubled me. I accepted with joy. The Minister told me that I must be ready to start in a month. I told him that would be easy for an old bachelor who had nothing much in the world but a few clothes and a few books.

"*'Comment, mon lieutenant!'* he cried. 'You are a bachelor?'

"*'Certainly,'* I answered. 'And I have every intention of remaining one.'

"In that case I am afraid I must withdraw my offer. For this position it is essential that you should be married.'

"It is too long a story to tell you, but the gist of it was that owing to the scandal my predecessor, a bachelor, had caused by having native girls to live in the Residency and the consequent complaints of the white people, planters and the wives of functionaries, it had been decided that the next Governor must be a model of respectability. I expostulated. I argued. I recapitulated my services to the country and the services my cousin could render at the next elections. Nothing would serve. The Minister was adamant.

"'But what can I do?' I cried with dismay.

"'You can marry,' said the Minister.

"*'Mais voyons, Monsieur le Ministre,* I do not know any women. I am not a lady's man and I am forty-nine. How do you expect me to find a wife?'

"'Nothing is more simple. Put an advertisement in the paper.'

"I was confounded. I did not know what to say.

"'Well, think it over,' said the Minister. 'If you can find a wife in a month you can go, but no wife, no job. That is my last word.' He smiled a little, to him the situation was not without humour. 'And if you think of advertising I recommend the *Figaro*.'

"I walked away from the Ministry with death in my heart. I knew the place to which they desired to appoint me and I knew it would suit me very well to live there; the climate was tolerable and the Residency was spacious and comfortable. The notion of being a Governor was far from displeasing me and, having nothing much but my pension as a naval officer, the salary was not to be despised. Suddenly I made up my mind. I walked to the offices of the *Figaro*, composed an advertisement, and handed it in for insertion. But I can tell you, when I walked up the Champs Elysées afterwards my heart was beating much more furiously than it had ever done when my ship was stripped for action."

The Governor leaned forward and put his hand impressively on my knee.

"*Mon cher monsieur*, you will never believe it, but I had four thousand three hundred and seventy-two replies. It was an avalanche. I had expected half a dozen; I had to take a cab to take the letters to my hotel. My room was swamped with them. There were four thousand three hundred and seventy-two women who were willing to share my solitude and be a Governor's lady. It was staggering. They were of all ages from seventeen to seventy. There were maidens of irreproachable ancestry and the highest culture; there were unmarried ladies who had made a little slip at one period of their career and now desired to regularise their situation; there were widows whose husbands had died in the most harrowing circumstances; and there were widows whose children would be a solace to my old age. They were blonde and dark, tall and short, fat and thin; some could speak five languages and others could play the piano. Some offered me love and some craved for it; some could only give me a solid friendship but mingled with esteem; some had a fortune and others golden prospects. I was overwhelmed. I was bewildered. At last I lost my temper, for I am a passionate man, and I got up and I stamped on all those letters and all those photographs and I cried, 'I will marry none of them'. It was hopeless, I had less than a month now and I could not see over four thousand aspirants to my hand in that time. I felt that if I did not see them all I should be tortured for the rest of my life by the thought that I had missed the one woman the fates had destined to make me happy. I gave it up as a bad job.

"I went out of my room hideous with all those photographs and littered papers and to drive care away went on to the boulevard and sat down at the *Café de la Paix*. After a time I saw a friend passing and he nodded to me and smiled. I tried to smile but my heart was sore. I realised that I must spend the years that remained to me in a cheap pension at Toulon or Brest as an *officier de marine en retraite*. *Zut!* My friend stopped and, coming up to me, sat down.

" 'What is making you look so glum, *mon cher?*' he asked me. 'You who are the gayest of mortals.'

"I was glad to have someone in whom I could confide my troubles and told him the whole story. He laughed consumedly. I have thought since that perhaps the incident had its comic side,

but at the time, I assure you, I could see in it nothing to laugh at. I mentioned the fact to my friend not without asperity, and then, controlling his mirth as best he could, he said to me: 'But, my dear fellow, do you really want to marry?' At this I entirely lost my temper.

" 'You are completely idiotic,' I said. 'If I did not want to marry, and, what is more, marry at once, within the next fortnight, do you imagine that I should have spent three days reading love letters from women I have never set eyes on?'

" 'Calm yourself and listen to me,' he replied. 'I have a cousin who lives in Geneva. She is Swiss, *du reste*, and she belongs to a family of the greatest respectability in the republic. Her morals are without reproach, she is of a suitable age, a spinster, for she has spent the last fifteen years nursing an invalid mother who has lately died, she is well educated, and *pardessus le marché* she is not ugly.'

" 'It sounds as though she were a paragon,' I said.

" 'I do not say that, but she has been well brought up and would become the position you have to offer her.'

" 'There is one thing you forget. What inducement would there be for her to give up her friends and her accustomed life to accompany in exile a man of forty-nine who is by no means a beauty?'

Monsieur le Gouverneur broke off his narrative and, shrugging his shoulders so emphatically that his head almost sank between them, turned to us.

"I am ugly. I admit it. I am of an ugliness that does not inspire terror or respect, but only ridicule, and that is the worst ugliness of all. When people see me for the first time they do not shrink with horror, there would evidently be something flattering in that, they burst out laughing. Listen, when the admirable Mr. Wilkins showed me his animals this morning, Percy, the oran-utan, held out his arms and but for the bars of the cage would have clasped me to his bosom as a long-lost brother. Once indeed when I was at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris and was told that one of the anthropoid apes had escaped I made my way to the exit as quickly as I could in fear that, mistaking me for the refugee, they would seize me and, notwithstanding my expostulations, shut me up in the monkey house."

"*Voyons, mon ami,*" said Madame his wife, in her deep slow voice, "you are talking even greater nonsense than usual. I do not

say that you are an Apollo, in your position it is unnecessary that you should be, but you have dignity, you have poise, you are what any woman would call a fine man."

"I will resume my story. When I made this remark to my friend he replied: 'One can never tell with women. There is something about marriage that wonderfully attracts them. There would be no harm in asking her. After all it is regarded as a compliment by a woman to be asked in marriage. She can but refuse.'

"'But I do not know your cousin and I do not see how I am to make her acquaintance. I cannot go to her house, ask to see her, and when I am shown into the drawing-room say: *Voilà*, I have come to ask you to marry me. She would think I was a lunatic and scream for help. Besides, I am a man of an extreme timidity, and I could never take such a step.'

"'I will tell you what to do,' said my friend. 'Go to Geneva and take her a box of chocolates from me. She will be glad to have news of me and will receive you with pleasure. You can have a little talk and then if you do not like the look of her you take your leave and no harm is done. If on the other hand you do, we can go into the matter and you can make a formal demand for her hand.'

"I was desperate. It seemed the only thing to do. We went to a shop at once and bought an enormous box of chocolates and that night I took the train to Geneva. No sooner had I arrived than I sent her a letter to say that I was the bearer of a gift from her cousin and much wished to give myself the pleasure of delivering it in person. Within an hour I received her reply to the effect that she would be pleased to receive me at four o'clock in the afternoon. I spent the interval before my mirror and seventeen times I tied and retied my tie. As the clock struck four I presented myself at the door of her house and was immediately ushered into the drawing-room. She was waiting for me. Her cousin said she was not ugly. Imagine my surprise to see a young woman, *enfin* a woman still young, of a noble presence, with the dignity of Juno, the features of Venus, and in her expression the intelligence of Minerva."

"You are too absurd," said Madame. "But by now these gentlemen know that one cannot believe all you say."

"I swear to you that I do not exaggerate. I was so taken aback that I nearly dropped the box of chocolates. But I said to myself: *La garde meurt mais ne se rend pas*. I presented the box of chocolates.

I gave her news of her cousin. I found her amiable. We talked for a quarter of an hour. And then I said to myself: *Allons-y*. I said to her:

" 'Mademoiselle, I must tell you that I did not come here merely to give you a box of chocolates.'

"She smiled and remarked that evidently I must have had reasons to come to Geneva of more importance than that.

" 'I came to ask you to do me the honour of marrying me.' She gave a start.

" 'But, monsieur, you are mad,' she said.

" 'I beseech you not to answer till you have heard the facts,' I interrupted, and before she could say another word I told her the whole story. I told her about my advertisement in the *Figaro* and she laughed till the tears ran down her face. Then I repeated my offer.

" 'You are serious?' she asked.

" 'I have never been more serious in my life.'

" 'I will not deny that your offer has come as a surprise. I had not thought of marrying, I have passed the age; but evidently your offer is not one that a woman should refuse without consideration. I am flattered. Will you give me a few days to reflect?'

" 'Mademoiselle, I am absolutely desolated,' I replied. 'But I have not time. If you will not marry me I must go back to Paris and resume my perusal of the fifteen or eighteen hundred letters that still await my attention.'

" 'It is quite evident that I cannot possibly give you an answer at once. I had not set eyes on you a quarter of an hour ago. I must consult my friends and my family.'

" 'What have they got to do with it? You are of full age. The matter is pressing. I cannot wait. I have told you everything. You are an intelligent woman. What can prolonged reflection add to the impulse of the moment?'

" 'You are not asking me to say yes or no this very minute? That is outrageous.'

" 'That is exactly what I am asking. My train goes back to Paris in a couple of hours.'

"She looked at me reflectively.

" 'You are quite evidently a lunatic. You ought to be shut up both for your own safety and that of the public.'

" 'Well, which is it to be?' I said. 'Yes or no?'

"She shrugged her shoulders.

"'Mon dieu!' She waited a minute and I was on tenterhooks. 'Yes.'

The Governor waved his hand towards his wife.

"And there she is. We were married in a fortnight and I became Governor of a colony. I married a jewel, my dear sirs, a woman of the most charming character, one in a thousand, a woman of a masculine intelligence and a feminine sensibility, an admirable woman."

"But hold your tongue, *mon ami*," his wife said. "You are making me as ridiculous as yourself."

He turned to the Belgian colonel.

"Are you a bachelor, *mon colonel*? If so I strongly recommend you to go to Geneva. It is a nest (*une pépinière* was the word he used) of the most adorable young women. You will find a wife there as nowhere else. Geneva is besides a charming city. Do not waste a minute, but go there and I will give you a letter to my wife's nieces."

It was she who summed up the story.

"The fact is that in a marriage of convenience you expect less and so you are less likely to be disappointed. As you do not make senseless claims on one another there is no reason for exasperation. You do not look for perfection and so you are tolerant to one another's faults. Passion is all very well, but it is not a proper foundation for marriage. *Voyez-vous*, for two people to be happy in marriage they must be able to respect one another, they must be of the same condition and their interests must be alike; then if they are decent people and are willing to give and take, to live and let live, there is no reason why their union should not be as happy as ours." She paused. "But, of course, my husband is a very, very remarkable man."

XXXV

IT was but a run of thirty-six hours from Bangkok to Kep, on the Cambodian coast, to which I was bound so that I could get to Pnom-Penh and so to Angkor. Kep, a strip of land in front of the sea backed by green hills, is a health station established by the French for the officials of their Government, and there is a large bungalow filled with them and their wives. It is in charge of a retired sea-captain and through him I was able to get a car to

take me to Pnom-Penh. This is the ancient capital of Cambodia, but nothing remains of its antiquity; it is a hybrid town built by the French and inhabited by the Chinese; it has broad streets with arcades in which are Chinese shops, formal gardens, and, facing the river, a quay neatly planted with trees like the quay in a French riverside town. The hotel is large, dirty, and pretentious, and there is a terrace outside it where the merchants and the innumerable functionaries may take an *apéritif* and for a moment forget that they are not in France.

Here the enthusiastic traveller may visit a palace, built within thirty years or so, where the descendant of so long a line of kings keeps up a semblance of royalty; and he will be shown his jewels, gold headdresses pyramidal and tinselly, a sacred sword, a sacred lance, and odd, old-fashioned ornaments presented to him by European potentates in the 'sixties; he may see a throne-room with a gorgeous, gaudy throne surmounted by a huge white nine-tiered umbrella; he may see a wat, very spick and span and new, with a great deal of gilt about it and a silver floor; and should he have a well-furnished memory and an alert imagination he may amuse himself with sundry reflections upon the trappings of royalty, the passing of empire, and the deplorable taste in art of crowned heads.

But if rather than a serious traveller he is a silly flippant person he may amuse himself with a little story.

Once upon a time at the palace of Pnom-Penh there was a great function for the reception of the new French Governor and his wife, and the King and all his court were dressed in their grandest clothes. The Governor's wife was shy and new to the country and, for something to say, admired a beautiful and jewelled belt that the monarch wore. Etiquette and Oriental politeness forced him immediately to take it off and offer it to her; but the belt was the only thing that kept up his royal trousers, so he turned to the Prime Minister and asked him to give him the belt, a trifle less grand, that he himself was wearing. The Prime Minister undid it and gave it to his master, but turned to the Minister of War, who stood next to him, and asked him to give him his. The Minister of War turned to the Grand Chamberlain and made the same request, and so it went on down the line from Minister to Minister, from one official to another, till at last a small page-boy was seen hurrying from the palace holding up his trousers with both hands. For he, the most insignificant of all that gathering, had found no one to give him a belt.

But the traveller before he leaves Pnom-Penh will be well advised to visit the museum, since here, probably for the first time in his life, he will see, among much that is dull and commonplace, examples of a school of sculpture that will give him a good deal to think about. He will see at least one statue that is as beautiful as anything that the Mayans or the archaic Greeks ever wrought from stone. But if, like me, he is a person of slow perceptions, it will not for some time occur to him that here, unexpectedly, he has come upon something that will for the rest of his life enrich his soul. So might a man buy a plot of land to build himself a little house and then discover that there was a gold mine underneath it.

XXXVI

ONE thing that makes a visit to Angkor an event of unusual significance—preparing you to enter into the state of mind proper to such an experience—is the immense difficulty of getting there. For once you have reached Pnom-Penh—itself a place sufficiently off the beaten track—you must take a steamer and go a long way up a dull and sluggish river, a tributary of the Mekong, till you reach a wide lake; you change into another steamer, flat-bottomed, for there is no great depth, and in this you travel all night; then you pass through a narrow defile and come to another great stretch of placid water. It is night again when you reach the end of it. Then you get into a sampan and are rowed among clumps of mangroves up a tortuous channel. The moon is full and the trees on the banks are sharply outlined against the night and you seem to traverse not a real country but the fantastic land of the silhouettist. At last you come to a bedraggled little village of watermen, whose dwellings are houseboats, and landing you drive down by the river side through plantations of coconut, betel, and plantain, and the river is now a shallow little stream (like the country stream in which on Sundays in your childhood you used to catch minnows and put them in a jam-pot) till at length, looming gigantic and black in the moonshine, you see the great towers of Angkor Wat.

But now that I come to this part of my book I am seized with dismay. I have never seen anything in the world more wonderful than the temples of Angkor, but I do not know how on earth I am

going to set down in black and white such an account of them as will give even the most sensitive reader more than a confused and shadowy impression of their grandeur. Of course to the artist in words, who takes pleasure in the sound of them and their look on the page, it would be an opportunity in a thousand. What a chance for prose pompous and sensual, varied, solemn and harmonious; and what a delight to such a one it would be to reproduce in his long phrases the long lines of the buildings, in the balance of his paragraphs to express their symmetry, and in the opulence of his vocabulary their rich decoration! It would be enchanting to find the apt word and by putting it in its right place give the same rhythm to the sentence as he had seen in the massed grey stones; and it would be a triumph to hit upon the unusual, the revealing, epithet that translated into another beauty the colour the form, and the strangeness of what he alone had had the gift to see.

Alas, I have not the smallest talent for this sort of thing, and—doubtless because I cannot do it myself—I do not very much like it in others. A little of it goes a long way with me. I can read a page of Ruskin with enjoyment, but ten only with weariness; and when I have finished an essay by Walter Pater I know how a trout feels when you have taken him off the hook and he lies on the bank flapping his tail in the grass. I admire the ingenuity with which, little piece of glass by little piece of glass, Pater fitted together the mosaic of his style, but it bores me. His prose is like one of those period houses, all Genoese velvet and carved wood, that they used to have in America twenty years ago, and you looked round desperately for a corner on which to put down your empty glass. I can bear it better when this kind of stately writing is done by our forefathers. The grand style became them. I am awed by the magnificence of Sir Thomas Browne; it is like staying in a great Palladian palace with frescoes by Veronese on the ceilings and tapestries on the walls. It is impressive rather than homely. You cannot see yourself doing your daily dozen in those august surroundings.

When I was young I took much trouble to acquire a style; I used to go to the British Museum and note down the names of rare jewels so that I might give my prose magnificence, and I used to go to the Zoo and observe the way an eagle looked or linger on a cab-rank to see how a horse champed so that I might on occasion use a nice metaphor; I made lists of unusual adjectives so that

I might put them in unexpected places. But it was not a bit of good. I found I had no bent for anything of the kind; we do not write as we want to but as we can, and though I have the greatest respect for those authors who are blessed with a happy gift of phrase I have long resigned myself to writing as plainly as I can. I have a very small vocabulary and I manage to make do with it, I am afraid, only because I see things with no great subtlety. I think perhaps I see them with a certain passion and it interests me to translate into words not the look of them, but the emotion they have given me. But I am content if I can put this down as briefly and baldly as if I were writing a telegram.

XXXVII

ON my journey up the river and across the lake I read the *Travels in Indo-China* of Henri Mouhot, a French naturalist, who was the first European to give a detailed description of the ruins of Angkor. His book is pleasant to read. It is a painstaking and straightforward account very characteristic of the period when the traveller had still the ingenuous belief that people who did not dress, eat, talk, and think as he did were very odd, and not quite human; and M. Mouhot narrated many things that would scarcely excite the astonishment of the more sophisticated and also more modest traveller of our day. But apparently he was not always accurate and my copy of his book had been at some time annotated in pencil by a later pilgrim. The corrections were neatly written in a hand that looked determined, but whether this *not so*, this *far from it*, this *quite wrong*, this *a palpable error* were due to a disinterested desire for truth, a wish to guide future readers, or merely to a sense of superiority, I had no means of telling. Perhaps, however, poor Mouhot may justly claim a certain indulgence, for, dying before he completed his journey, he had no opportunity to correct and explain his notes. Here are the last two entries in his diary:

19th—Attacked by fever.

29th—Have pity on me, oh my God . . . !

And here is the beginning of a letter he wrote a little while before he died:

Louang Prabang (Laos),

23rd July, 1861.

Now, my dear Jenny, let us converse together. Do you know of what I often think when everyone around me is asleep, and I, lying wrapped in my mosquito-curtains, let my thoughts wander back to all the members of my family? Then I seem to hear again the charming voice of my little Jenny, and to be listening once more to "*La Traviata*", "*The Death of Nelson*", or some other of the airs that I loved so much to hear you sing. I then feel regret, mingled with joy, at the souvenir of the happy—oh, how happy!—past. Then I open the gauze curtains, light my pipe, and gaze out upon the stars, humming softly the "*Pâtre*" of Béranger, or the "*Old Sergeant*" . . .

By the portraits of him he was a man of an open countenance, with a full curly beard and a long moustache, and his thinning curly hair gave him a noble brow. In a frock coat he looked a respectable rather than a romantic figure, but in a bérêt with a long tassel there was in his mien something dashing and naïvely ferocious. He might then very well have passed for a corsair in a drama of the 'sixties.

But it was a very different Angkor Wat that met the intrepid gaze of Henri Mouhot from that which the tourist now can so conveniently visit. If indeed you are curious to know what this stupendous monument looked like before the restorer set to work upon it (it must be admitted, unobtrusively) you can get a very good impression by taking a narrow path through the forest, when you will come presently upon a huge grey gateway covered with lichen and moss. On the upper part of it, on the four sides, dimly emerging from ruined masonry is, four times repeated, the impassive head of Siva. On each side of the gateway, half-hidden by jungle, are the remains of a massive wall and in front of it, choked with weeds and water-plants, a broad moat. Entering you find yourself in a vast courtyard, strewn with fragments of statues and green stones on which you vaguely discern sculpture; you walk softly on dead brown leaves and they squelch ever so faintly under your tread. Here grow enormous trees, towering above you, shrubs of all kinds and dank weeds; they grow among the crumbling masonry, forcing it apart, and their roots writhe like snakes upon the surface of the stony soil. The courtyard is surrounded by ruined corridors and you climb hazardously up steep, slippery, and broken stairs, threading your way through passages and

vaulted chambers dripping with wet and heavy with the stink of bats; the pedestals on which stood the gods are overturned and the gods are gone. And in the corridors and on the terraces the tropical vegetation grows fiercely. Here and there the great pieces of carved stone hang perilously. Here and there on a bas-relief still miraculously in place stand the dancing-girls veiled with lichen, mockingly, in their everlasting gestures of abandonment.

For centuries nature has waged its battle with the handiwork of man; it has covered, disfigured, and transformed it, and now all these buildings that a multitude of slaves built with so much labour lie a confused tangle among the trees. Here lurk the cobras whose broken images you see on the stones around you. Hawks fly high overhead and the gibbons leap from branch to branch; but it is green and dark and you seem beneath that wanton leafage to wander at the bottom of the sea.

It chanced that one day towards dusk, when I was wandering about this temple, for in its ruin it offered peculiar sensations that I found it curious to expose myself to, I was overtaken by a storm. I had seen the great dark clouds massed in the north-west and it had seemed to me that never again could the temple in the jungle be seen by me more mysteriously; but after a while I felt something strange in the air and looking up saw that the dark clouds were on a sudden charging down upon the forest. The rain came suddenly and then the thunder, not a single peal but roll upon roll reverberating down the sky, and lightning that blinded me, darting and slashing fiercely. I was deafened and confused by the noise, and the lightning startled me. The rain fell not as in our temperate zone, but with an angry vehemence, in sheets, storming down as though the heavens were emptying themselves of flooded lakes. It seemed to fall with no blind unconscious force, but with a purpose and a malignancy which were, alas, but too human. I stood in a doorway, not a little frightened, and as the lightning tore the darkness like a veil I saw the jungle stretching endlessly before me, and it seemed to me that these great temples and their gods were insignificant before the fierce might of nature. Its power there was so manifest, spoke with so stern and insistent a voice, that it was easy to understand how man had devised his gods and built great temples to house them to serve as a screen between himself and the force that terrified and crushed him. For nature is the most powerful of all the gods.

XXXVIII

IN case the reader is a trifle perplexed by all this commotion of the elements I will set down now for his edification a few facts of general interest. Angkor was a city of great extent, the capital of a powerful empire and, for ten miles around, the jungle is dotted with the remains of the temples that adorned it. Angkor Wat is but one of these and has claimed more than the rest the attentions of the archæologist, the restorer, and the traveller only because when discovered by the West it was in a less ruined state. No one knows why the city was abandoned so suddenly that they have found blocks of stones in the quarries ready to take their place in an unfinished temple, and the experts have in vain sought for a plausible explanation.

Some of the temples look as though they have been in great part wantonly destroyed; and the notion has been hazarded that when the rulers after some unfortunate battle fled the country, the wretched slaves who had spent their lives through so many generations to erect these massive buildings in vengeance overthrew what they had been obliged with blood and sweat to construct. This is conjecture. The only thing certain is that here was a city thriving and populous and now there remains nothing but a few ruined temples and the teeming forest. The houses were of wood, surrounded by their little compounds, like the houses I had so lately seen at Keng Tung, and it would not have taken long for them to decay; the jungle, held in check for a while by the business of man, flowed back, an irresistible green sea, upon the scene of his futile activity. At the end of the thirteenth century it was one of the great cities of the East; two hundred years later it was the resort of wild beasts.

Angkor Wat is placed due east and west and the sun rises directly behind the five towers that surmount it. It is surrounded by a broad moat, which you cross by a great causeway paved with flagstones, and the trees are delicately reflected in the still water.

It is an impressive rather than a beautiful building and it needs the glow of sunset or the white brilliance of the moon to give it a loveliness that touches the heart. It is grey veiled by a faint green, which is the colour of the moss and the mould of all the rainy seasons it has seen, but at sunset it is buff, pale, and warm. At dawn when the country is bathed in a silver mist the towers have

an aspect that is strangely unsubstantial; they have then an airy lightness which they lack in the hard white light of noon. Twice a day, when the sun rises and when it sets, a miracle is performed and they gain a beauty not their own. They are the mystic towers of the spirit's high citadel. The temple and its dependencies are built on a strictly formal plan. This part balances that and one side repeats the other. The architects exercised no great power of invention, but built on the pattern dictated to them by the rites of their religion. They had neither wanton fancy nor vivid imagination. They yielded to no sudden inspiration. They were deliberate. They gained their effects by regularity and by vastness. The modern eye, of course, has been distorted by the huge buildings that are now so easily constructed, mammoth hotel and enormous apartment house, so that the great size of Angkor Wat must be realised by an effort of the imagination; but to those for whom it was built it must have seemed stupendous. The very steep steps that lead from one storey to another give it a singular effect of height. They are not the broad and noble stairs of the West, fit for the pageantry of processions, but an arduous and hurried means of ascent to the presence of a secret and mysterious god. They render the divinity remote and enigmatic. On each storey, four to each, are large sunken basins in which was water for purification, and the water at those strange heights must have added strangely to the silence and the awe. It is a religion of which the temples are empty and the god lives alone except at stated periods when the devout bring gifts to appease him. It is the home now of innumerable bats and the air is fetid with them; in each dark passage and sombre chamber you hear their twitterings.

This plainness of construction gave the sculptors ample occasion for decoration. Capitals, pilasters, pediments, doorways, windows are enriched with carving of an unimaginable variety. The themes are few, but on them they embroidered many beautiful inventions. Here they had a free hand and with a fury of creation crammed into these narrow limits all the adventures of their impetuous souls. It is interesting to note, as you go from temple to temple, how in the course of centuries these unknown craftsmen passed from rude strength to consummate grace; and how at first regardless of the whole they made their decoration an end in itself, but at long last learnt to submit themselves to the general plan. What they lost in power they gained in taste; it is for each one to say which he prefers.

The galleries are adorned with bas-reliefs; they are interminable; they are world-famous; but to attempt to describe them would be as foolish as to attempt to describe the jungle. Here you have princes on elephants with the state umbrellas open over their heads making a progress among graceful trees; they form a pleasing pattern which is repeated along the length of a wall like the pattern of a paper. There you have long lines of soldiers marching into battle, and the gestures of their arms and the movements of their legs follow the same formal design as that of the dancers in a Cambodian dance. But they join battle and break into frenzied movement; even the dying and the dead are contorted into violent attitudes. Above them the chieftains advance on their elephants and in their chariots, brandishing swords and lances. And you get a feeling of unbridled action, of the turmoil and stress of battle, a breathlessness, an agitation, and a disorder, which is infinitely curious. Every inch of the space is covered with figures, horses, elephants, and chariots; you can discern neither plan nor pattern, and only the chariot-wheels rest the eye in this chaos. You cannot discover a rhythm. For it was not beauty that the artists sought, but action; they cared little for elegance of gesture or purity of line; theirs was no emotion recollected in tranquillity, but a living passion that brooked no limits. Here is nothing of the harmony of the Greeks, but the rush of a torrential stream and the terrible, vehement life of the jungle. Yet there are not a few that are withal as lovely as the Elgin Marbles and when you look at them you would be dull indeed if you were not caught by the rapture that pure beauty affords. But, alas, this excellence was produced only for a brief period; for the rest, the drawing for the most part is poor and the patterns tedious. The sculptors seem to have been content to go on from generation to generation slavishly copying one another and you wonder that sheer boredom did not induce them now and again to break into a new design. The draughtsmen who make laborious drawings of them discern in the sameness many differences, but they are only such as you might find in a piece of prose copied by a hundred hands. The writing is different, but the sense remains the same. And as I wandered about looking disconsolately at so much that was dull I wished that I had by my side a philosopher who could explain to me why it is that man can never remain in one stay. Why is it, I wanted to ask him, that having known the best he should content himself so comfortably with the mediocre? Is it that circumstances—or

is it genius, the genius of the individual?—raise him for a while to heights at which he cannot breathe easily, so that he is content to make his way down again to the homely plain? Is man like water that can be forced to an artificial altitude, but that reverts, as soon as the force is removed, to its own level? It looks as though his normal condition were the lowest state of civilisation compatible with his environment and in this he can remain unchanged from age to age. Perhaps my philosopher would have told me that only a few races are capable of raising themselves above the dust, and then only for a little while; and even they are conscious that their state is extraordinary, and they fall back with relief to the condition that is only a little better than the beasts. But if he had, then I would have asked him if man were not perfectible. But I should have accepted it with humility if he had said, "Come along, don't stay there talking a lot of nonsense, let's go and have tiffin." I should have said to myself that perhaps he had varicose veins and to stand so long made his legs ache.

XXXIX

I CAME to the last day I could spend at Angkor. I was leaving it with a wrench, but I knew by now that it was the sort of place that, however long one stayed, it would always be a wrench to leave. I saw things that day that I had seen a dozen times, but never with such poignancy; and as I sauntered down those long grey passages and now and then caught sight of the forest through a doorway all I saw had a new beauty. The still courtyards had a mystery that made me wish to linger in them a little longer, for I had a notion that I was on the verge of discovering some strange and subtle secret; it was as though a melody trembled in the air, but so low that the ears could just not catch it. Silence seemed to dwell in these courts like a presence that you could see if you turned round and my last impression of Angkor was like my first, that of a great silence. And it gave me I know not what strange feeling to look at the living forest that surrounded this great grey pile so closely, the jungle luxuriant and gay in the sunlight, a sea of different greens; and to know that there all round me had once stood a multitudinous city.

That night a troupe of Cambodian dancers were dancing on the terrace of the temple. We were escorted along the causeway by

boys carrying a hundred lighted torches. The resin of which they were made charged the air with an acrid, pleasant perfume. They formed a great circle of flame, flickering and uncertain on the terrace, and in the middle of it the dancers trod their strange measure. Musicians, hidden by the darkness, played on pipes and drums and gongs, a vague and rhythmical music that troubled the nerves. My ears awaited with a sort of tremor the resolution of harmonies strange to me, but never attained it. The dancers wore tight-fitting dresses of richly glowing colours and on their heads high golden crowns. By day no doubt they would have looked trumpery, but in that unexpected light they had a gorgeousness and a mystery that you find with difficulty in the East. Their impassive faces were dead white with powder so that they looked like masks. No emotion, no fleeting thought, were permitted to disturb the immobility of their expression. Their hands were beautiful, with small and tapering fingers, and in the progress of the dance their gestures, elaborate and complicated, pointed their elegance and emphasised their grace. Their hands were like rare and fantastic orchids. There was no abandon in their dance. Their attitudes were hieratic and their movements formal. They were like idols that had come to life but still were impregnated with divinity.

And those gestures, those attitudes, were the same as of those of the bayadères that the old sculptors had graven on the stone walls of the temples. They had not changed in a thousand years. Repeated endlessly on every wall in every temple, you will see the self-same elegant writhing of the delicate fingers, the self-same arching of the slender body, as delights your eye in the living dancer before you. No wonder they are grave under their gold crowns when they bear the weight of so long an ancestry.

The dance ended, the torches were extinguished, and the little crowd shuffled away pell-mell into the night. I sat on a parapet taking a last look at the five towers of Angkor Wat.

My thoughts went back to a temple that I had visited a day or two before. It is called Bayon. It surprised me because it had not the uniformity of the other temples I had seen. It consists of a multitude of towers one above the other, symmetrically arranged, and each tower is a four-faced, gigantic head of Siva the Destroyer. They stand in circles one within the other and the four faces of the god are surmounted by a decorated crown. In the middle is a great tower with face rising above face till the apex is reached. It

is all battered by time and weather, creepers and parasitic shrubs grow all about, so that at a first glance you see only a shapeless mass and it is only when you look a little more closely that these silent, heavy, impassive faces loom out at you from the rugged stone. Then they are all round you. They face you, they are at your side, they are behind you, and you are watched by a thousand unseeing eyes. They seem to look at you from the remote distance of primeval time and all about you the jungle grows fiercely. You cannot wonder that the peasants when they pass should break into loud song in order to frighten away the spirits; for towards evening the silence is unearthly and the effect of all those serene and yet malevolent faces is eerie. When the night falls the faces sink away into the stones and you have nothing but a strange, shrouded collection of oddly-shaped turrets.

But it is not on account of the temple itself that I have described it—I have, albeit with a halting pen, already described more than enough—it is for the sake of the bas-reliefs that line one of its corridors. They are not very well done, and the sculptors had but too obviously little sense of form or line, but they have notwithstanding an interest which at this moment called them up vividly to my memory. For they represent scenes in the common life of the day in which they were done, the preparation of rice for the pot, the cooking of food, the catching of fish and the snaring of birds, the buying and selling at the village shop, the visit to the doctor, and in short the various activities of a simple people. It was startling to discover how little in a thousand years this life of theirs had changed. They still do the same things with the same utensils. The rice is pounded or husked in the self-same way and the village shopkeeper on the same tray offers for sale the same bananas and the same sugar cane. These patient, industrious folk carry the same burdens on the same yokes as their ancestors carried so many generations back. The centuries have passed leaving no trace upon them, and some sleeper of the tenth century awakening now in one of these Cambodian villages would find himself at home in the artless round of daily life.

Then it seemed to me that in these countries of the East the most impressive, the most awe-inspiring, monument of antiquity is neither temple, nor citadel, nor great wall, but man. The peasant with his immemorial usages belongs to an age far more ancient than Angkor Wat, the Great Wall of China, or the Pyramids of Egypt.

AT the mouth of the little river I got once more into the flat-bottomed steamer and crossed the wide, shallow lake, changed into another boat and went down another river. Finally I reached Saigon.

Notwithstanding the Chinese city that has grown up since the French occupied the country, and notwithstanding the natives who saunter along the pavements or, in wide straw hats like extinguishers, pull rickshaws, Saigon has all the air of a little provincial town in the South of France. It is laid out with broad streets, shaded with handsome trees, and there is a bustle in them that is quite unlike the bustle of an Eastern town in an English colony. It is a blithe and smiling little place. It has an opera house white and shining, built in the flamboyant style of the Third Republic, which faces a broad avenue; and it has a Hotel de Ville which is very grand, new, and ornate. Outside the hotels are terraces and at the hour of the *apéritif* they are crowded with bearded, gesticulating Frenchmen, drinking the sweet and sickly beverages, Vermouth Cassis, Byrrh, and Quinquina Dubonnet, which they drink in France, and they talk nineteen to the dozen in the rolling accent of the Midi. Gay little ladies who have something to do with the local theatre are dressed in smart clothes and with their pencilled eyebrows and rouged cheeks bring a cheerful air of sophistication to this far-distant spot. In the shops you will find Paris dresses from Marseilles and London hats from Lille. Victorias drawn by two little ponies gallop past and motor-cars toot their horns. The sun beats down from a cloudless sky and the shade is heavy with the heat and solid.

Saigon is a pleasant enough place to idle in for a few days; life is made easy for the casual traveller; and it is very agreeable to sit under the awning on the terrace of the Hotel Continental, an electric fan just above your head, and with an innocent drink before you to read in the local paper heated controversies upon the affairs of the Colony and the *faits divers* of the neighbourhood. It is charming to be able to read steadily through the advertisements without an uneasy feeling that you are wasting your time, and it must be a dull mind that in such a perusal does not find here and there occasion for a pleasant gallop on a hobby-horse through the realms of time and space.

But I only stayed long enough to catch my boat for Huë.

Huë is the capital of Annam and I was bound there in order to see the festivities for the Chinese New Year which were to be held at the Emperor's court. But Huë is situated on a river and the port for it is Tourane. It was there, then, that the Messageries boat—a clean, white, comfortable craft properly arranged for travel in hot latitudes with plenty of space and plenty of air and cold drinks—set me down at two one morning. She anchored in the bay, seven or eight kilometres from the wharf, and I got into a sampan. The crew consisted of two women, a man, and a small boy. The bay was calm and the stars were shining thick overhead. We rowed out into the night and the lights on the quay seemed immensely far away. The boat was heavy with water and every now and then one of the women stopped rowing and baled it out with an empty kerosene tin. There was the shadow of a breeze and presently they put up a great square sail of bamboo matting, but it was too light a wind to help us much and the journey looked as though it would last till day-break. So far as I was concerned it might have lasted for ever; I lay on bamboo mats, smoking a pipe and now and then falling into a light doze, and when I awoke and relit my pipe the match showed me for a moment the brown fat faces of the two women squatting by the mast. The man at the tiller made a short remark and one of the women answered him. Then again the silence was complete but for the faint swish of the water under the boards on which I lay. The night was so warm that with nothing on but a shirt and a pair of khaki trousers I did not feel cold and the air was as soft as the feel of flowers. We made a long tack into the night and then going about found our slow way to the mouth of the river. We passed fishing-boats lying at anchor and others silently creeping out into the stream. The banks of the river were dark and mysterious. On a word from the man the two women lowered the clumsy sail and began once more to row. We came to the quay and the water was so shallow that I had to be carried ashore on the back of a coolie. It is a proceeding that has always seemed to me both terrifying and undignified and I clung to the coolie's neck in a manner that I well knew ill became me. The hotel was just across the road and coolies shouldered my luggage. But it was barely five and still very dark and no one was awake in the hotel. The coolies hammered on the door and at last a sleepy servant opened it. The rest of them were lying about fast asleep on the billiard table and on the

floor. I asked for a room and coffee. The fresh bread was just ready and my *café au lait* with rolls hot from the oven, very welcome after that long journey across the bay, made a meal such as I have not often had the good luck to eat. I was shown a dirty, sordid little room, with a mosquito-net grimy and torn, and I do not know how many commercial travellers and officials of the French Government had passed through the sheets on the bed since last they were washed. I did not care. It seemed to me that I had never arrived anywhere in such romantic style and I could not but think that this must be the preface to an experience that would be memorable.

But there are places of which the only point is the arrival; they promise the most fantastic adventures of the spirit and give you no more than three meals a day and last year's films. They are like a face full of character that intrigues and excites you, but that on closer acquaintance you discover is merely the mask of a vulgar soul. Such is Tourane.

I spent one morning there in order to visit the museum, in which there is a collection of Khmer sculpture. The reader may possibly remember that when I wrote of Pnom-Penh I became strangely eloquent (for a person who does not much like others to gush and is shy of superlatives) about a statue to be seen there. This was a Khmer work and now I may remind him (or tell him if, like me till I went to Indo-China, he never knew that Khmers or their sculpture existed) that this was a mighty nation, the offspring of the aboriginal tribes of Indo-China and an invading race from the plateaux of Central Asia, who founded a far-flung and powerful empire. Immigrants from Eastern India brought them the Sanskrit language, Brahmanism, and the culture of their native land; but the Khmers were vigorous people and they had a creative instinct that enabled them to make their own use of the knowledge the strangers brought them. They built magnificent temples and adorned them with sculptures, founded, it is true, on the art of India, but which have at their best an energy, a boldness of execution, a fertility, and a brilliant fancy to be found nowhere else in the East. The statue of Harihara* at Pnom-Penh testifies to the greatness of

* I am somewhat puzzled by the name given by the French authorities to the deity represented in this statue. I always thought that Hari and Hara were the names under which were commonly known Siva and Vishnu, and to call a god Harihara looks very much like calling a single respectable person Crosseand-blackwell. But since I suppose the experts know better than I, I have referred to this statue throughout by the name they give it.

their genius. It is a miracle of grace. It calls to mind the archaic statuary of Greece and the Mayan sculpture of Mexico; but it has a character all its own. Those early Greek works have the dewy freshness of the morning, but their beauty is a trifle vacant; the Mayan statues have something primeval in them, they excite awe rather than admiration, for they have in them still the touch of early man who drew in the dark recesses of his caverns magic pictures to cast a spell on the beasts he feared or hunted; but in the Harihara you have a singular and enigmatic union of the archaic and the sophisticated. It has the candour of the primitive quickened by the complexity of the civilised. The Khmer brought a long inheritance of thought to the craft which had so suddenly captivated his fancy. It is as though to the England of the Elizabethan age had come, a bolt from the blue, the art of painting in oil; and the artists, their souls charged with the plays of Shakespeare, the conflict of religions at the Reformation, and the Armada, had begun to paint with the hand of Cimabue. Something like this must have been the state of mind of the sculptor who made the statue in Pnom-Penh. It has power and simplicity and an exquisite line, but it has also a spiritual quality that is infinitely moving. It has not only beauty, but intelligence.

These great works of the Khmers gain a peculiar poignancy when you reflect that a few ruined temples strewn about the jungle and a few mutilated statues scattered here and there in museums are all that remains of this mighty empire and this restless people. Their power was broken, they were dispersed, becoming drawers of water and hewers of wood, they died out; and now, the rest of them assimilated by their conquerors, their name endures only in the art they so lavishly produced.

XLI

HUE is a pleasant little town with something of the leisurely air of a cathedral city in the West of England and though the capital of an empire it is not imposing. It is built on both sides of a wide river, crossed by a bridge, and the hotel is one of the worst in the world. It is extremely dirty and the food is dreadful; but it is also a general store in which everything is provided that the colonist may want, from camp-equipment and guns, women's hats, and men's reach-me-downs to sardines, *pâté de foie gras*, and

Worcester sauce; so that the hungry traveller can make up with tinned goods for the inadequacy of the bill of fare. Here the inhabitants of the town come to drink their coffee and *fine* in the evening and the soldiers of the garrison to play billiards. The French have built themselves solid, rather showy houses without much regard for the climate or the environment; they look like the villas of retired grocers in the suburbs of Paris.

The French carry France to their colonies just as the English carry England to theirs; and the English, reproached for their insularity, can justly reply that in this matter they are no more singular than their neighbours. But not even the most superficial observer can fail to notice that there is a great difference in the manner in which these two nations behave towards the natives of the countries of which they have gained possession. The Frenchman has deep down in him a persuasion that all men are equal and that mankind is a brotherhood. He is slightly ashamed of it and in case you should laugh at him makes haste to laugh at himself; but there it is, he cannot help it; he cannot prevent himself from feeling that the native, black, brown, or yellow, is of the same clay as himself, with the same loves, hates, pleasures, and pains, and he cannot bring himself to treat him as though he belonged to a different species. Though he will brook no encroachment on his authority and deals firmly with any attempt the native may make to lighten his yoke, in the ordinary affairs of life he is friendly with him without condescension and benevolent without superiority. He inculcates in him his peculiar prejudices; Paris is the centre of the world, and the ambition of every young Annamite is to see it at least once in his life; you will hardly meet one who is not convinced that outside France there is neither art, literature, nor science. But the Frenchman will sit with the Annamite, eat with him, drink with him, and play with him. In the market-place you will see the thrifty Frenchwoman with her basket on her arm jostling the Annamite housekeeper and bargaining just as fiercely. No one likes having another take possession of his house, even though he conducts it more efficiently and keeps it in better repair than ever he could himself; he does not want to live in the attics even though his master has installed a lift for him to reach them; and I do not suppose the Annamites like it any more than the Burmese that strangers hold their country. But I should say that whereas the Burmese only respect the English, the Annamites admire the French. When in course of time these peoples inevit-

ably regain their freedom it will be curious to see which of these emotions has borne the better fruit.

The Annamites are a pleasant people to look at, very small, with yellow flat faces and bright dark eyes, and they look very spruce in their clothes. The poor wear brown of the colour of rich earth, a long tunic slit up the sides, and trousers, with a girdle of apple-green or orange round their waists; and on their heads a large flat straw hat or a small black turban with very regular folds. The well-to-do wear the same neat turban, with white trousers, a black silk tunic, and over this sometimes a black lace coat. It is a costume of great elegance.

But though in all these lands the clothes the people wear attract our eyes because they are peculiar, in each everyone is dressed very much alike; it is a uniform they wear, picturesque often and always suitable to the climate, but it allows little opportunity for individual taste; and I could not but think it must amaze the native of an Eastern country visiting Europe to observe the bewildering and vivid variety of costume that surrounds him. An Oriental crowd is like a bed of daffodils at a market gardener's, brilliant but monotonous; but an English crowd, for instance that which you see through a faint veil of smoke when you look down from above on the floor of a Promenade Concert, is like a nosegay of every kind of flower. Nowhere in the East will you see costumes so gay and multifarious as on a fine day in Piccadilly. The diversity is prodigious. Soldiers, sailors, policemen, postmen, messenger boys; men in tail coats and top hats, in lounge suits and bowlers, men in plus fours and caps, women in silk and cloth and velvet, in all the colours, and in hats of this shape and that. And besides this there are the clothes worn on different occasions and to pursue different sports, the clothes servants wear, and workmen, jockeys, huntsmen, and courtiers. I fancy the Annamite will return to Huë and think his fellow-countrymen dress very dully.

XLII

ANNAM was for long centuries under the suzerainty of China and its Emperor sent tribute to the Son of Heaven. Its civilisation was Chinese and its temples were erected in honour of Confucius rather than of Gautama. The palace, surrounded by a moat and a wall, covers a vast extent. It is Chinese, but in a shoddy and

second-hand way; it is tired and a trifle depressing. You pass down a trim road planted with little trees and on each side of this are gardens and pavilions. But in the gardens the grass grows ragged and rank; there are untidy bushes that look like ill-cared-for children, and stunted trees. They are so deserted that you find it hard to believe that somewhere in the background, unseen by you, dwells surrounded by his women and eunuchs and mandarins an Emperor ruling shadowy under the power of France. You feel that it is a pretence that he can hardly be at pains to keep up. You pass through throne-rooms gaudily painted and decorated with gold, long dimly-lit halls in which are the ancestral tablets of the Emperor, and apartments in which are displayed the gifts that from time to time have been presented to him, French clocks and Sèvres porcelain, Chinese pottery and ornaments of jade; but just as at the marriage of your friends you give them a more costly present if they are rich and do not need it than if they are poor and do, so here the donors have measured their generosity with acumen.

But the ceremonies of the Tet were conducted with pomp. This is the celebration of the Chinese New Year, when the Emperor, in imitation again of the Son of Heaven, receives the homage of his mandarins. I had received an invitation and at seven in the morning, feeling embarrassed in a dinner jacket and a stiff shirt, I found at the palace gate a group of French civilians similarly dressed and a number of officers in uniform. The Résident Supérieur drove up and we followed him into the courtyard. In the large open space soldiers in bright and fantastic uniforms were lined up and in front of them two lines of mandarins according to their rank, the civil on the right and the military on the left. A little below were the eunuchs and the imperial orchestras and on each side was a royal elephant in state caparison with a man holding a state umbrella over the howdah. The mandarins were dressed in the Manchu fashion in high boots with thick white soles, silk robes splendidly embroidered, with voluminous sleeves, and black hats decorated with gold. Bugles blew and we, the Europeans, crowded into the throne-room. It was rather dark. The Emperor sat on the dais. In his gold robes he sank into the gold of the throne and the gold backcloth of the canopy over it so that at first you were hardly conscious that a living person was there. He stood up. At each corner of the dais stood a man in blue holding a state fan and behind the throne a row of servants

in darker blue bore the royal utensils, the betel-nut tray, the spittoon, and I know not what. A little in front two soldiers magnificently dressed in orange held before them upright golden swords; they stood like images and looked neither to the right nor to the left. The Emperor too looked like an image as he stood motionless with no expression on his sallow, long, thin face.

The Résident Supérieur read an address and the Emperor read his reply. He read in a high-pitched voice in a sort of sing-song that made it sound like a litany. The Europeans retired to the side of the hall and the Emperor sat down. In front of the throne was a low altar and on this the Emperor's uncle, a little old man with a sparse grey beard, now placed what looked like two books wrapped in red silk. Then the two brothers of the Emperor took up their positions in front of the altar, not facing the Emperor but each other, and at the same moment the mandarins in the courtyard, who had been standing quite still during the reading of the speeches, came forward on to bamboo mats that had been set for them, but in order according to their rank and class. They also faced not the Emperor but each other. A band began to play and singers burst into song. This was the signal for the two Princes of the blood and for the mandarins in the courtyard to turn and face the Emperor. The chorus was silent and the Princes and the mandarins knelt down and touched the ground with their foreheads. They moved as one. A huge gong sounded from the tower over the palace gateway and the chorus again began to sing. Then with one impressive movement like well-drilled soldiers the mandarins prostrated themselves. This was repeated five times. The Emperor sat impassive and made no acknowledgement of the obeisances. He might have been a golden idol. The throne-room, which had looked so tawdry the day before, now, set off by the gorgeous clothes and smart uniforms, had if not magnificence at least a barbaric splendour. Then all the mandarins bowed three times and unceremoniously shuffled out of their ranks, the Princes of the blood smiled, shook hands with their French friends, and complained of the heat of their robes, the Emperor, without much dignity, stepped off his throne. He walked quickly into a sort of ante-chamber and the officials of the court and the foreigners followed him. Here in two rows stood soldiers holding the royal umbrellas and various staffs, and a band of page-boys in green played drums and fifes and with vigour struck gongs. Sweet champagne was handed round with biscuits and sweetmeats and

cigars. In a little while the Emperor was borne away on his palanquin, a low, round, gilt chair, by twelve men in red. The ceremony was over.

In the evening I went to a party at the palace. The Emperor and the Résident Supérieur sat on large gilt arm-chairs in the central doorway of the throne-room and the guests were gathered round about. The courtyard was lit with innumerable little oil lamps and a native orchestra played lustily. Three fantastic figures, like those of the Chinese drama, in splendid Chinese dresses came upon the scene and trod a grotesque measure. Then the Imperial ballet, a large number of boys and youths in beautiful old-fashioned costumes that reminded one of the eighteenth-century pictures of the Far East, danced and sang. They had lanterns on their shoulders, with lighted candles in them, and they moved about in complicated patterns that formed Chinese characters wishing the Emperor good luck and prosperity. It was more like a drill than a dance, but the effect was strange and pretty. They gave place to other dancers, men dressed up as huge cocks, emitting fire from their beaks, or as buffaloes and fearful dragons, and they cut fantastic capers; then came fireworks and the courtyard was filled with smoke and the noisiness of crackers.

This ended the native part of the entertainment and the foreigners gathered round the buffet. The court pages, on European instruments, began to play a one-step. The foreigners danced.

The Emperor wore a tunic of yellow silk richly embroidered and on his head a yellow turban. He was a man of thirty-five, rather taller than most of the Annamites, and very thin. His face was strangely smooth. He looked very frail but incredibly distinguished. My last impression of the party was of him leaning in a careless attitude against a table, smoking a cigarette and chatting with a young Frenchman. Every now and then his eyes rested for a moment incuriously on the conquerors clumsily dancing.

It was late now and I was setting out at dawn by car for Hanoi. It seemed hardly worth while to go to bed and as I drove in my rickshaw to the hotel I asked myself why I should not spend the rest of the night on the river. It would do if I got back in time to change, bathe myself, and have a cup of coffee before starting. I explained to my rickshaw boy what I wanted and he took me down to the river. There was a landing-stage just below the bridge and here we found half a dozen sampans moored to the side. Their

owners were sleeping in them, but at least one of them was sleeping lightly, for he awoke as he heard me walk down the stone steps, and put his head out of the blanket in which he was wrapped. The rickshaw boy spoke to him and he got up. He called to a woman asleep in the boat. I stepped in. The woman untied and we slipped out into the stream. These boats have a low round awning of bamboo matting, just high enough to sit upright under, and bamboo matting on the boards. You can shut them up with shutters, but I told the man to leave the front open so that I could look at the night. In the heights of heaven the stars shone very bright as though up there too there were a party. The man brought me a pot of Chinese tea and a cup. I poured some out and lit my pipe. We went along very slowly and the sound of the paddle in the water was the only sound that broke the silence. It was delightful to think that I had all those hours before me to enjoy that sense of well-being and I thought to myself how when I was once more in Europe, imprisoned in stony cities, I would remember that perfect night and the enchanting solitude. It would be the most imperishable of my memories. It was a unique occasion and I said to myself that I must hoard the moments as they passed. I could not afford to waste one of them. I was laying up treasure for myself. And I thought of all the things I would to reflect upon, and of the melancholy that I would subtly savour as you savour the first scented strawberries of the year; and I would think of love, and invent stories and meditate upon beautiful things like art and death. The paddle hit the water very gently and I could just feel the boat glide on. I made up my mind to watch and cherish every exquisite sensation that came to me.

Suddenly I felt a bump. What was it? I looked out and it was broad day. The bump was the bump of the boat against the landing-stage, and there was the bridge just above me.

"Good God," I cried, "I've been asleep."

I had slept right through the night and there was my cup of tea cold by my side. My pipe had fallen out of my mouth. I had lost all those priceless moments and had slept solidly through the hours. I was furious. I might never have the opportunity again to spend a night in a sampan on an Eastern river and now I should never have those wonderful thoughts and matchless emotions that I had promised myself. I paid for the boat and still in evening clothes ran up the steps and went to the hotel. My hired car was waiting for me at the door.

XLIII

HERE I had the intention of finishing this book, for at Hanoi I found nothing much to interest me. It is the capital of Tonkin and the French tell you it is the most attractive town in the East, but, when you ask them why, answer that it is exactly like a town, Montpellier or Grenoble, in France. And Haiphong, to which I went in order to get a boat to Hong Kong, is a commercial town and dull. It is true that from it you can visit the Bay of Along, which is one of the *sehenswürdigkeiten* of Indo-China, but I was tired of sights. I contented myself with sitting in the café, for here it was none too warm and I was glad to get out of tropical clothes, and reading back numbers of *L'Illustration*, or for the sake of exercise taking a brisk walk along straight, wide streets. Haiphong is traversed by canals and sometimes I got a glimpse of a scene which in its varied life, with all the native craft on the water, was multicoloured and charming. There was one canal, with tall Chinese houses on each side of it, that had a pleasant curve. The houses were whitewashed, but the whitewash was discoloured and stained; with their grey roofs they made an agreeable composition against the pale sky. The picture had the faded elegance of an old water-colour. There was nowhere an emphatic note. It was soft and a little weary and inspired one with a faint melancholy. I was reminded, I scarcely know why, of an old maid I knew in my youth, a relic of the Victorian age, who wore black silk mittens and made crochet shawls for the poor, black for widows and white for married women. She had suffered in her youth, but whether from ill-health or unrequited love, no one exactly knew.

But there was a local paper at Haiphong, a small dingy sheet with stubby type the ink of which came off on your fingers, and it gave you a political article, the wireless news, advertisements, and local intelligence. The editor, doubtless hard pressed for matter, printed the names of the persons, Europeans, natives of the country, and Chinese, who had arrived at Haiphong or left it, and mine was put in with the rest. On the morning of the day before that on which my boat was to sail for Hong Kong I was sitting in the café of the hotel drinking a Dubonnet before luncheon when the boy came in and said that a gentleman wished to see me. I did not know a soul in Haiphong and asked who it was. The boy said he was an Englishman and lived there, but he could not tell me his

name. The boy spoke very little French and it was hard for me to understand what he said. I was mystified, but told him to show the visitor in. A moment later he came back followed by a white man and pointed me out to him. The man gave me a look and walked towards me. He was a very tall fellow, well over six feet high, rather fat and bloated, with a red, clean-shaven face and extremely pale blue eyes. He wore very shabby khaki, shorts and a stingah-shifter unbuttoned at the neck, and a battered helmet. I concluded at once that he was a stranded beachcomber who was going to touch me for a loan and wondered how little I could hope to get off for.

He came up to me and held out a large red hand with broken, dirty nails.

"I don't suppose you remember me," he said. "My name's Grosely. I was at St. Thomas's Hospital with you. I recognised your name as soon as I saw it in the paper and I thought I'd look you up."

I had not the smallest recollection of him, but I asked him to sit down and offered him a drink. By his appearance I had first thought he would ask me for ten piastres and I might have given him five, but now it looked more likely that he would ask for a hundred and I should have to think myself lucky if I could content him with fifty. The habitual borrower always asks twice what he expects to get and it only dissatisfies him to give him what he has asked since then he is vexed with himself for not having asked more. He feels you have cheated him.

"Are you a doctor?" I asked.

"No, I was only at the bloody place a year."

He took off his sun-helmet and showed me a mop of grey hair, which much needed a brush. His face was curiously mottled and he did not look healthy. His teeth were badly decayed and at the corners of his mouth were empty spaces. When the boy came to take the orders he asked for brandy.

"Bring the bottle," he said. "*La bouteille*. Savvy?" He turned to me. "I've been living here for the last five years, but I can't get along with French somehow. I talk Tonkinese." He leaned his chair back and looked at me. "I remember you, you know. You used to go about with those twins. What was their name? I expect I've changed more than you have. I've spent the best part of my life in China. Rotten climate, you know. It plays hell with a man."

I still had not the smallest recollection of him. I thought it best to say so.

"Were you the same year as I was?" I asked.

"Yes. '92."

"It's a devil of a long time ago."

About sixty boys and young men entered the hospital every year; they were most of them shy and confused by the new life they were entering upon; many had never been in London before; and to me at least they were shadows that passed without any particular rhyme or reason across a white sheet. During the first year a certain number for one reason or another dropped out, and in the second year those that remained gained by degrees the beginnings of a personality. They were not only themselves, but the lectures one had attended with them, the scone and coffee one had eaten at the same table for luncheon, the dissection one had done at the same board in the same dissecting room, and *The Belle of New York* one had seen together from the pit of the Shaftesbury Theatre.

The boy brought the bottle of brandy, and Grosely, if that was really his name, pouring himself out a generous helping drank it down at a gulp without water or soda.

"I couldn't stand doctoring," he said, "I chucked it. My people got fed up with me and I went out to China. They gave me a hundred pounds and told me to shift for myself. I was damned glad to get out, I can tell you. I guess I was just about as much fed up with them as they were with me. I haven't troubled them much since."

Then from somewhere in the depths of my memory a faint hint crept into the rim, as it were, of consciousness, as on a rising ride the water slides up the sand and then withdraws to advance with the next wave in a fuller volume. I had first an inkling of some shabby little scandal that had got into the papers. Then I saw a boy's face, and so gradually the facts recurred to me; I remembered him now. I didn't believe he was called Grosely then, I think he had a one-syllabled name, but that I was uncertain of. He was a very tall lad (I began to see him quite well), thin, with a slight stoop, he was only eighteen and had grown too fast for his strength, he had curly, shining brown hair, rather large features (they did not look so large now, perhaps because his face was fat and puffy) and a peculiarly fresh complexion, very pink and white, like a girl's. I imagine people, women especially, would have

thought him a very handsome boy, but to us he was only a clumsy, shuffling lout. Then I remembered that he did not often come to lectures—no, it wasn't that I remembered, there were too many students in the theatre to recollect who was there and who wasn't. I remembered the dissecting room. He had a leg at the next table to the one I was working at and he hardly ever touched it; I forget why the men who had other parts of the body complained of his neglecting the work, I suppose somehow it interfered with them. In those days a good deal of gossip went on over the dissection of a "part" and out of the distance of thirty years some of it came back to me. Someone started the story that Grosely was a very gay dog. He drank like a fish and was an awful womaniser. Most of those boys were very simple, and they had brought to the hospital the notions they had acquired at home and at school. Some were prudish and they were shocked; others, those who worked hard, sneered at him and asked how he could hope to pass his exams; but a good many were excited and impressed, he was doing what they would have liked to do if they had had the courage. Grosely had his admirers and you could often see him surrounded by a little band listening open-mouthed to stories of his adventures. Recollections now were crowding upon me. In a very little while he lost his shyness and assumed the airs of a man of the world. They must have looked absurd on this smooth-cheeked boy with his pink and white skin. Men (so they called themselves) used to tell one another of his escapades. He became quite a hero. He would make caustic remarks as he passed the museum and saw a pair of earnest students going over their anatomy together. He was at home in the public-houses of the neighbourhood and was on familiar terms with the barmaids. Looking back, I imagine that, newly arrived from the country and the tutelage of parents and schoolmasters, he was captivated by his freedom and the thrill of London. His dissipations were harmless enough. They were due only to the urge of youth. He lost his head.

But we were all very poor and we did not know how Grosely managed to pay for his garish amusements. We knew his father was a country doctor and I think we knew exactly how much he gave his son a month. It was not enough to pay for the harlots he picked up on the promenade at the Pavilion and for the drinks he stood his friends in the Criterion Bar. We told one another in awe-struck tones that he must be getting fearfully into debt. Of

course he could pawn things, but we knew by experience that you could not get more than three pounds for a microscope and thirty shillings for a skeleton. We said he must be spending at least ten pounds a week. Our ideas were not very grand and this seemed to us the wildest pitch of extravagance. At last one of his friends disclosed the mystery: Grosely had discovered a wonderful system for making money. It amused and impressed us. None of us would have thought of anything so ingenious or have had the nerve to attempt it if he had. Grosely went to auctions, not Christie's, of course, but auctions in the Strand and Oxford Street, and in private houses, and bought anything portable that was going cheap. Then he took his purchase to a pawnbroker's and pawned it for ten shillings or a pound more than he had paid. He was making money, four or five pounds a week, and he said he was going to give up medicine and make a regular business of it. Not one of us had ever made a penny in his life and we regarded Grosely with admiration.

"By Jove, he's clever," we said.

"He's just about as sharp as they make them."

"That's the sort that ends up as a millionaire."

We were all very worldly-wise and what we didn't know about life at eighteen we were pretty sure wasn't worth knowing. It was a pity that when an examiner asked us a question we were so nervous that the answer often flew straight out of our head and when a nurse asked us to post a letter we blushed scarlet. It became known that the Dean had sent for Grosely and hauled him over the coals. He had threatened him with sundry penalties if he continued systematically to neglect his work. Grosely was indignant. He'd had enough of that sort of thing at school, he said, he wasn't going to let a horse-faced eunuch treat him like a boy. Damn it all, he was getting on for nineteen and there wasn't much you could teach him. The Dean had said he heard he was drinking more than was good for him. Damned cheek. He could carry his liquor as well as any man of his age, he'd been blind last Saturday and he meant to get blind next Saturday, and if anyone didn't like it he could do the other thing. Grosely's friends quite agreed with him that a man couldn't let himself be insulted like that.

But the blow fell at last and now I remembered quite well the shock it gave us all. I suppose we had not seen Grosely for two or three days, but he had been in the habit of coming to the

hospital more and more irregularly, so, if we thought anything about it, I imagine we merely said that he was off on one of his bats. He would turn up again in a day or so, rather pale, but with a wonderful story of some girl he had picked up and the time he had had with her. The anatomy lecture was at nine in the morning and it was a rush to get there in time. On this particular day little attention was paid to the lecturer, who, with a visible pleasure in his limpid English and admirable elocution, was describing I know not what part of the human skeleton, for there was much excited whispering along the benches and a newspaper was surreptitiously passed from hand to hand. Suddenly the lecturer stopped. He had a pedagogic sarcasm. He affected not to know the names of his students.

"I am afraid I am disturbing the gentleman who is reading the paper. Anatomy is a very tedious science and I regret that the regulations of the Royal College of Surgeons oblige me to ask you to give it enough of your attention to pass an examination in it. Any gentleman, however, who finds this impossible is at liberty to continue his perusal of the paper outside."

The wretched boy to whom this reproof was addressed reddened to the roots of his hair and in his embarrassment tried to stuff the newspaper in his pocket. The professor of anatomy observed him coldly.

"I am afraid, sir, that the paper is a little too large to go into your pocket," he remarked. "Perhaps you would be good enough to hand it down to me?"

The newspaper was passed from row to row to the well of the theatre, and, not content with the confusion to which he had put the poor lad, the eminent surgeon, taking it, asked:

"May I inquire what it is in the paper that the gentleman in question found of such absorbing interest?"

The student who gave it to him without a word pointed out the paragraph that we had all been reading. The professor read it and we watched him in silence. He put the paper down and went on with his lecture. The headline ran *Arrest of a Medical Student*. Grosely had been brought before the police-court magistrate for getting goods on credit and pawning them. It appears that this is an indictable offence and the magistrate had remanded him for a week. Bail was refused. It looked as though his method of making money by buying things at auctions and pawning them had not in the long run proved as steady a source of income as he

expected and he had found it more profitable to pawn things that he was not at the expense of paying for. We talked the matter over excitedly as soon as the lecture was over and I am bound to say that, having no property ourselves, so deficient was our sense of its sanctity we could none of us look upon his crime as a very serious one; but with the natural love of the young for the terrible there were few who did not think he would get anything from two years' hard labour to seven years' penal servitude.

I do not know why, but I did not seem to have any recollection of what happened to Grosely. I think he may have been arrested towards the end of a session and his case may have come on again when we had all separated for holidays. I did not know if it was disposed of by the police-court magistrate or whether it went up for trial. I had a sort of feeling that he was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment, six weeks perhaps, for his operations had been pretty extensive; but I knew that he had vanished from our midst and in a little while was thought of no more. It was strange to me that after all these years I should recollect so much of the incident so clearly. It was as though, turning over an album of old snapshots, I saw all at once the photographs of a scene I had quite forgotten.

But of course in that gross elderly man with grey hair and mottled red face I should never have recognised the lanky pink-cheeked boy. He looked sixty, but I knew he must be much less than that. I wondered what he had done with himself in the intervening time. It did not look as though he had excessively prospered.

"What were you doing in China?" I asked him.

"I was a tide-waiter."

"Oh, were you?"

It is not a position of great importance and I took care to keep out of my tone any note of surprise. The tide-waiters are employees of the Chinese Customs whose duty it is to board the ships and junks at the various treaty ports and I think their chief business is to prevent opium-smuggling. They are mostly retired A.B.s from the Royal Navy and non-commissioned officers who have finished their time. I have seen them come on board at various places up the Yangtze. They hobnob with the pilot and the engineer, but the skipper is a trifle curt with them. They learn to speak Chinese more fluently than most Europeans and often marry Chinese women.

"When I left England I swore I wouldn't go back till I'd made my pile. And I never did. They were glad enough to get anyone to be a tide-waiter in those days, any white man, I mean, and they didn't ask questions. They didn't care who you were. I was damned glad to get the job, I can tell you, I was about broke to the wide when they took me on. I only took it till I could get something better, but I stayed on, it suited me, I wanted to make money and I found out that a tide-waiter could make a packet if he knew the right way to go about. I was with the Chinese Customs for the best part of twenty-five years and when I came away I wouldn't mind betting that lots of commissioners would have been glad to have the money I had."

He gave me a sly, mean look. I had an inkling of what he meant. But there was a point on which I was willing to be reassured; if he was going to ask me for a hundred piastres (I was resigned to that sum now) I thought I might just as well take the blow at once.

"I hope you kept it," I said.

"You bet I did. I invested all my money in Shanghai and when I left China I put it all in American railway bonds. Safety first is my motto. I know too much about crooks to take any risks myself."

I liked that remark, so I asked him if he wouldn't stay and have luncheon with me.

"No, I don't think I will. I don't eat much tiffin and anyway my chow's waiting for me at home. I think I'll be getting along." He got up and he towered over me. "But look here, why don't you come along this evening and see my place? I've married a Haiphong girl. Got a baby too. It's not often I get a chance of talking to anyone about London. You'd better not come to dinner. We only eat native food and I don't suppose you'd care for that. Come along about nine, will you?"

"All right," I said.

I had already told him that I was leaving Haiphong next day. He asked the boy to bring him a piece of paper so that he might write down his address. He wrote laboriously in the hand of a boy of fourteen.

"Tell the porter to explain to your rickshaw boy where it is. I'm on the second floor. There's no bell. Just knock. Well, see you later."

He walked out and I went in to luncheon.

After dinner I called a rickshaw and with the porter's help made

the boy understand where I wanted to go. I found presently that he was taking me along the curved canal the houses of which had looked to me so like a faded Victorian water-colour; he stopped at one of them and pointed to the door. It looked so shabby and the neighbourhood was so squalid that I hesitated, thinking he had made a mistake. It seemed unlikely that Grosely could live so far in the native quarter and in a house so bedraggled. I told the rickshaw boy to wait and pushing open the door saw a dark staircase in front of me. There was no one about and the street was empty. It might have been the small hours of the morning. I struck a match and fumbled my way upstairs; on the second floor I struck another match and saw a large brown door in front of me. I knocked and in a moment it was opened by a little Tonkinese woman holding a candle. She was dressed in the earth-brown of the poorer classes, with a tight little black turban on her head; her lips and the skin round them were stained red with betel and when she opened her mouth to speak I saw that she had the black teeth and black gums that so disfigure these people. She said something in her native language and then I heard Grosely's voice:

"Come along in. I was beginning to think you weren't going to turn up."

I passed through a little dark ante-chamber and entered a large room that evidently looked on the canal. Grosely was lying on a long chair and he raised his length from it as I came in. He was reading the Hong Kong papers by the light of a paraffin lamp that stood on a table by his side.

"Sit down," he said, "and put your feet up."

"There's no reason I should take your chair."

"Go on. I'll sit on this."

He took a kitchen chair and sitting on it put his feet on the end of mine.

"That's my wife," he said pointing with his thumb at the Tonkinese woman who had followed me into the room. "And over there in the corner's the kid."

I followed his eyes and against the wall, lying on bamboo mats and covered with a blanket, I saw a child sleeping.

"Lively little beggar when he's awake. I wish you could have seen him. She's going to have another soon."

I glanced at her and the truth of what he said was apparent. She was very small, with tiny hands and feet, but her face was flat and the skin muddy. She looked sullen, but may only have been shy.

She went out of the room and presently came back with a bottle of whisky, two glasses, and a syphon. I looked round. There was a partition at the back, of dark unpainted wood, which I suppose shut off another room, and pinned against the middle of this was a portrait cut out of an illustrated paper of John Galsworthy. He looked austere, mild, and gentlemanly, and I wondered what he did there. The other walls were whitewashed, but the whitewash was dingy and stained. Pinned on to them were pages of pictures from *The Graphic* or *The Illustrated London News*.

"I put them up," said Grosely; "I thought they made the place look home-like."

"What made you put up Galsworthy? Do you read his books?"

"No, I didn't know he wrote books. I liked his face."

There were one or two torn and shabby rattan mats on the floor and in a corner a great pile of *The Hong Kong Times*. The only furniture consisted of a wash-hand stand, two or three kitchen chairs, a table or two and a large teak native bed. It was cheerless and sordid.

"Not a bad little place, is it?" said Grosely. "Suits me all right. Sometimes I've thought of moving, but I don't suppose I ever shall now." He gave a little chuckle. "I came to Haiphong for forty-eight hours and I've been here five years. I was on my way to Shanghai really."

He was silent. Having nothing to say I said nothing. Then the little Tonkinese woman made a remark to him, which I could not of course understand, and he answered her. He was silent again for a minute or two, but I thought he looked at me as though he wanted to ask me something. I did not know why he hesitated.

"Have you ever tried smoking opium on your travels in the East?" he inquired at last, casually.

"Yes, I did once, at Singapore. I thought I'd like to see what it was like."

"What happened?"

"Nothing very thrilling, to tell you the truth. I thought I was going to have the most exquisite emotions. I expected visions, like de Quincey's, you know. The only thing I felt was a kind of physical well-being, the same sort of feeling that you get when you've had a Turkish bath and are lying in the cooling room, and then a peculiar activity of mind so that everything I thought of seemed extremely clear."

"I know."

"I really felt that two and two are four and there could not be the smallest doubt about it. But next morning—oh God! My head reeled. I was as sick as a dog, I was sick all day, I vomited my soul out, and as I vomited I said to myself miserably: 'And there are people who call this fun'."

Grosely leaned back in his chair and gave a low mirthless laugh.

"I expect it was bad stuff. Or you went at it too hard. They saw you were a mug and gave you dregs that had been smoked already. They're enough to turn anybody up. Would you like to have another try now? I've got some stuff here that I know's good."

"No, I think once was enough for me."

"D'you mind if I have a pipe or two? You want it in a climate like this. It keeps you from getting dysentery. And I generally have a bit of a smoke about this time."

"Go ahead," I said.

He spoke again to the woman and she, raising her voice, called out something in a raucous tone. An answer came from the room behind the wooden partition and after a minute or two an old woman came out carrying a little round tray. She was shrivelled and old and when she entered gave me an ingratiating smile of her stained mouth. Grosely got up and crossed over to the bed and lay on it. The old woman set the tray down on the bed; on it was a spirit lamp, a pipe, a long needle and a little round box of opium. She squatted on the bed and Grosely's wife got on it too and sat, her feet tucked up under her, with her back against the wall. Grosely watched the old woman while she put a little pellet of the drug on the needle, held it over the flame till it sizzled and then plugged it into the pipe. She handed it to him and with a great breath he inhaled it, he held the smoke for a little while, and then blew it out in a thick grey cloud. He handed her back the pipe and she started to make another. Nobody spoke. He smoked three pipes in succession and then sank back.

"By George, I feel better now. I was feeling all in. She makes a wonderful pipe, this old hag. Are you sure you won't have one?"

"Quite."

"Please yourself. Have some tea, then."

He spoke to his wife, who scrambled off the bed and went out of the room. Presently she came back with a little china pot of tea and a couple of Chinese bowls.

"A lot of people smoke here, you know. It does you no harm

if you don't do it to excess. I never smoke more than twenty to twenty-five pipes a day. You can go on for years if you limit yourself to that. Some of the Frenchmen smoke as many as forty or fifty a day. That's too much. I never do that, except now and then when I feel I want a binge. I'm bound to say it's never done me any harm."

We drank our tea, pale and vaguely scented and clean on the palate. Then the old woman made him another pipe and then another. His wife had got back on to the bed and soon curling herself up at his feet went to sleep. Grosely smoked two or three pipes at a time, and while he was smoking seemed intent upon nothing else, but in the intervals he was loquacious. Several times I suggested going, but he would not let me. The hours wore on. Once or twice while he smoked I dozed. He told me all about himself. He went on and on. I spoke only to give him a cue. I cannot relate what he told me in his own words. He repeated himself. He was very long-winded and he told me his story confusedly, first a late bit, then an early bit, so that I had to arrange the sequence for myself; sometimes I saw that, afraid he had said too much, he held something back; sometimes he lied and I had to make a guess at the truth from the smile he gave me or the look in his eyes. He had not the words to describe what he had felt, and I had to conjecture his meaning from slangy metaphors and hackneyed, vulgar phrases. I kept on asking myself what his real name was, it was on the tip of my tongue and it irritated me not to be able to recall it, though why it should in the least matter to me I did not know. He was somewhat suspicious of me at first and I saw that this escapade of his in London and his imprisonment had been all these years a tormenting secret. He had always been haunted by the fear that sooner or later someone would find out.

"It's funny that even now you shouldn't remember me at the hospital," he said, looking at me shrewdly. "You must have a rotten memory."

"Hang it all, it's nearly thirty years ago. Think of the thousands of people I've met since then. There's no reason why I should remember you any more than you remember me."

"That's right. I don't suppose there is."

It seemed to reassure him. At last he had smoked enough and the old woman made herself a pipe and smoked it. Then she went over to the mat on which the child was lying and huddled down beside it. She lay so still that I supposed she had fallen directly

asleep. When at last I went, I found my boy curled up on the foot-board of the rickshaw in so deep a slumber that I had to shake him. I knew where I was and I wanted air and exercise, so I gave him a couple of piastres and told him I would walk.

It was a strange story I carried away with me.

It was with a sort of horror that I had listened to Grosely, telling me of those twenty years he had spent in China. He had made money, I do not know how much, but from the way he talked I should think something between fifteen and twenty thousand pounds, and for a tide-waiter it was a fortune. He could not have come by it honestly, and little as I knew of the details of his trade, by his sudden reticences, by his leers and hints, I guessed that there was no base transaction that, if it was made worth his while, he jibbed at. I suppose that nothing paid him better than smuggling opium, and his position gave him the opportunity to do this with safety and profit. I understood that his superior officers had often had their suspicions of him, but had never been able to get such proof of his *mæ*!practices as to justify them in taking any steps. They contented themselves with moving him from one port to another, but that did not disturb him; they watched him, but he was too clever for them. I saw that he was divided between the fear of telling me too much to his discredit and the desire to boast of his own astuteness. He prided himself on the confidence the Chinese had placed in him.

"They knew they could trust me," he said, "and it gave me a pull. I never double-crossed a Chinaman once."

The thought filled him with the complacency of the honest man. The Chinese discovered that he was keen on curios and they got in the habit of giving him bits or bringing him things to buy; he never made inquiries how they had come by them and he bought them cheap. When he had got a good lot he sent them to Peking and sold them at a handsome profit. I remembered how he had started his commercial career by buying things at auctions and pawning them. For twenty years by shabby shift and petty dishonesty he added pound to pound, and everything he made he invested in Shanghai. He lived penuriously, saving half his pay; he never went on leave because he did not want to waste his money; he would not have anything to do with the Chinese women, he wanted to keep himself free from any entanglement; he did not drink. He was consumed by one ambition, to save enough to be able to go back to England and live the life from which he had

been snatched as a boy. That was the only thing he wanted. He lived in China as though in a dream; he paid no attention to the life around him; its colour and strangeness, its possibilities of pleasure, meant nothing to him. There was always before him the mirage of London, the Criterion Bar, himself standing with his foot on the rail, the promenade at the Empire and the Pavilion, the picked-up harlot, the serio-comic at the music hall and the musical comedy at the Gaiety. This was life and love and adventure. This was romance. This was what he yearned for with all his heart. There was surely something impressive in the way in which during all those years he had lived like an anchorite with that one end in view of leading again a life that was so vulgar. It showed character.

"You see," he said to me, "even if I'd been able to get back to England on leave I wouldn't have gone. I didn't want to go till I could go for good. And then I wanted to do the thing in style."

He saw himself putting on evening clothes every night and going out with a gardenia in his button-hole, and he saw himself going to the Derby in a long coat and a brown hat and a pair of opera glasses slung over his shoulder. He saw himself giving the girls a look-over and picking out the one he fancied. He made up his mind that on the night he arrived in London he would get blind, he hadn't been drunk for twenty years; he couldn't afford to in his job, you had to keep your wits about you. He'd take care not to get drunk on the ship on the way home. He'd wait till he got to London. What a night he'd have! He thought of it for twenty years.

I do not know why Grosely left the Chinese Customs, whether the place was getting too hot for him, whether he had reached the end of his service, or whether he had amassed the sum he had fixed. But at last he sailed. He went second class; he did not intend to start spending money till he reached London. He took rooms in Jermyn Street, he had always wanted to live there, and he went straight to a tailor's and ordered himself an outfit. Slap-up. Then he had a look round the town. It was different from how he remembered it, there was much more traffic and he felt confused and a little at sea. He went to the Criterion and found there was no longer a bar where he had been used to lounge and drink. There was a restaurant in Leicester Square where he had been in the habit of dining when he was in funds, but he could not find it; he supposed it had been torn down. He went to the Pavilion, but

there were no women there; he was rather disgusted and went on to the Empire, he found they had done away with the Promenade. It was rather a blow. He could not quite make it out. Well, anyhow, he must be prepared for changes in twenty years, and if he couldn't do anything else he could get drunk. He had had fever several times in China and the change of climate had brought it on again, he wasn't feeling any too well, and after four or five drinks he was glad to go to bed.

That first day was only a sample of many that followed it. Everything went wrong. Grosely's voice grew peevish and bitter as he told me how one thing and another had failed him. The old places were gone, the people were different, he found it hard to make friends, he was strangely lonely; he had never expected that in a great city like London. That's what was wrong with it: London had become too big, it wasn't the jolly, intimate place it had been in the early 'nineties. It had gone to pieces. He picked up a few girls, but they weren't as nice as the girls he had known before, they weren't the fun they used to be, and he grew dimly conscious that they thought him a rum sort of cove. He was only just over forty and they looked upon him as an old man. When he tried to cotton on to a lot of young fellows standing round a bar they gave him the cold shoulder. Anyway, these young fellows didn't know how to drink. He'd show them. He got soused every night, it was the only thing to do in that damned place, but, by Jove, it made him feel rotten next day. He supposed it was the climate of China. When he was a medical student he could drink a bottle of whisky every night and be as fresh as a daisy in the morning. He began to think more about China. All sorts of things that he never knew he had noticed came back to him. It wasn't a bad life he'd led there. Perhaps he'd been a fool to keep away from those Chinese girls, they were pretty little things some of them, and they didn't put on the airs these English girls did. One could have a damned good time in China if one had the money he had. One could keep a Chinese girl and get into the club, and there'd be a lot of nice fellows to drink with and play bridge with and billiards. He remembered the Chinese shops and all the row in the streets and the coolies carrying loads and the ports with the junks in them and the rivers with pagodas on the banks. It was funny, he never thought much of China while he was there, and now—well, he couldn't get it out of his mind. It obsessed him. He began to think that London was no place for a white man. It had just gone

to the dogs, that was the long and short of it, and one day the thought came to him that perhaps it would be a good thing if he went back to China. Of course it was silly, he'd worked like a slave for twenty years to be able to have a good time in London, and it was absurd to go and live in China. With his money he ought to be able to have a good time anywhere. But somehow he couldn't think of anything else but China. One day he went to the pictures and saw a scene at Shanghai. That settled it. He was fed up with London. He hated it. He was going to get out and this time he'd get out for good. He had been home a year and a half, and it seemed longer to him than all his twenty years in the East. He took a passage on a French boat sailing from Marseilles, and when he saw the coast of Europe sink into the sea he heaved a great sigh of relief. When they got to Suez and he felt the first touch of the East he knew he had done the right thing. Europe was finished. The East was the only place.

He went ashore at Djibouti and again at Colombo and Singapore, but though the ship stopped for two days at Saigon he remained on board there. He'd been drinking a good deal and he was feeling a bit under the weather. But when they reached Haiphong, where they were staying for forty-eight hours, he thought he might just as well have a look at it. That was the last stopping-place before they got to China. He was bound for Shanghai. When he got there he meant to go to a hotel and look around a bit and then get hold of a girl and a place of his own. He would buy a pony or two and race. He'd soon make friends. In the East they weren't so stiff and standoffish as they were in London. Going ashore, he dined at the hotel and after dinner got into a rickshaw and told the boy he wanted a woman. The boy took him to the shabby tenement in which I had sat for so many hours and there were the old woman and the girl who was now the mother of his child. After a while the old woman asked him if he wouldn't like to smoke. He had never tried opium, he had always been frightened of it, but now he didn't see why he shouldn't have a go. He was feeling good that night and the girl was a jolly cuddlesome little thing; she was rather like a Chinese girl, small and pretty, like an idol. Well, he had a pipe or two, and he began to feel very happy and comfortable. He stayed all night. He didn't sleep. He just lay, feeling very restful, and thought about things.

"I stopped there till my ship went on to Hong Kong," he said. "And when she left I just stopped on."

"How about your luggage?" I asked.

For I am perhaps unworthily interested in the manner people combine practical details with the ideal aspects of life. When in a novel penniless lovers drive in a long, swift racing-car over the distant hills I have always a desire to know how they managed to pay for it; and I have often asked myself how the characters of Henry James in the intervals of subtly examining their situation coped with the physiological necessities of their bodies.

"I only had a trunk full of clothes, I was never one to want much more than I stood up in, and I went down with the girl in a rickshaw to fetch it. I only meant to stay on till the next boat came through. You see, I was so near China here I thought I'd wait a bit and get used to things, if you understand what I mean, before I went on."

I did. Those last words of his revealed him to me. I knew that on the threshold of China his courage had failed him. England had been such a terrible disappointment that now he was afraid to put China to the test too. If that failed him he had nothing. For years England had been like a mirage in the desert. But when he had yielded to the attraction, those shining pools and the palm trees and the green grass were nothing but the rolling sandy dunes. He had China, and so long as he never saw it again he kept it.

"Somehow I stayed on. You know, you'd be surprised how quickly the days pass. I don't seem to have time to do half the things I want to. After all I'm comfortable here. The old woman makes a damned good pipe, and she's a jolly little girl, my girl, and then there's the kid. A lively young beggar. If you're happy somewhere what's the good of going somewhere else?"

"And are you happy here?" I asked him.

I looked round that large, bare, sordid room. There was no comfort in it and not one of the little personal things that one would have thought might have given him the feeling of home. Grossely had taken on this equivocal little apartment, which served as a house of assignation and as a place for Europeans to smoke opium in, with the old woman who kept it, just as it was, and he camped, rather than lived, there still as though next day he would pack his traps and go. After a little while he answered my question.

"I've never been so happy in my life. I often think I'll go on to Shanghai some day, but I don't suppose I ever shall. And God knows, I never want to see England again."

"Aren't you awfully lonely sometimes for people to talk to?"

"No. Sometimes a Chinese tramp comes in with an English skipper or a Scotch engineer, and then I go on board and we have a talk about old times. There's an old fellow here, a Frenchman who was in the customs, and he speaks English; I go and see him sometimes. But the fact is I don't want anybody very much. I think a lot. It gets on my nerves when people come between me and my thoughts. I'm not a big smoker, you know, I just have a pipe or two in the morning to settle my stomach, but I don't really smoke till night. Then I think."

"What d'you think about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. Sometimes about London and what it was like when I was a boy. But mostly about China. I think of the good times I had and the way I made my money, and I remember the fellows I used to know, and the Chinese. I had some narrow squeaks now and then, but I always came through all right. And I wonder what the girls would have been like that I might have had. Pretty little things. I'm sorry now I didn't keep one or two. It's a great country, China; I love those shops, with an old fellow sitting on his heels smoking a water-pipe, and all the shop-signs. And the temples. By George, that's the place for a man to live in. There's life."

The mirage shone before his eyes. The illusion held him. He was happy. I wondered what would be his end. Well, that was not yet. For the first time in his life perhaps he held the present in his hand.

XLIV

I TOOK a shabby little steamer from Haiphong to Hong Kong, which ran along the coast stopping at various French ports on the way to take on and discharge cargo. It was very old and dirty. There were but three passengers beside myself. Two were French missionaries bound for the island of Hainan. One was an elderly man with a large square grey beard and the other was young, with a round red face on which his beard grew in little black patches. They spent most of the day reading their breviaries and the younger one studied Chinese. Then there was an American Jew called Elfenbein who was travelling in hosiery. He was a tall fellow, powerfully built and strong, clumsy of gesture, with a long sallow face, a big straight nose, and dark eyes. His voice was loud and

strident. He was aggressive and irascible. He abused the ship, he abused the steward, he abused the boys, he abused the food. Nothing satisfied him. All the time you heard his voice raised in anger because his boxes of show goods were not placed as they should be, because he couldn't get a hot bath, because the soda water wasn't cold enough. He was a man with a chip on his shoulder. Everyone seemed in a conspiracy to slight or injure him and he kept threatening to give the captain or the steward a hit on the nose. Because I was the only person on board who spoke English, he attached himself to me and I could not settle down on deck for five minutes without his coming to sit by me and telling me his latest grievance. He forced drinks on me which I did not want, and, when I refused, cried, "Oh, come on, be a sport", and ordered them notwithstanding. To my confusion he addressed me constantly as brother. He was odious, but I must admit that he was often amusing; he would tell damaging stories about his fellow Jews in a racy idiom that made them very entertaining. He talked interminably. He hated to be alone for a minute and it never occurred to him that you might not want his company; but when he was with you he was perpetually on the look-out for affronts. He trod heavily on your corns and if you tucked your feet out of the way thought you insulted him. It made his society excessively fatiguing. He was the kind of Jew who made you understand the pogrom. I told him a little story about the Peace Conference. It appears that on one occasion Monsieur Paderewski was pressing upon Mr. Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George, and Monsieur Clemenceau the Polish claims on Danzig.

"If the Poles do not get it," he said, "I warn you that their disappointment will be so great there will be an outbreak and they will assassinate the Jews."

Mr. Wilson looked grave, Mr. Lloyd George shook his head, and M. Clemenceau frowned.

"But what will happen if the Poles get Danzig?" asked Mr. Wilson.

M. Paderewski brightened. He shook his leonine mane.

"Ah, that will be quite another thing," he replied. "Their enthusiasm will be so great there will be an outbreak and they will assassinate the Jews."

Elfenbein saw nothing funny in it.

"Europe's no good," he said. "If I had my way I'd sink the whole of Europe under the sea."

Then I told him about Henri Deplis. He was by birth a native of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. On maturer reflection he became a commercial traveller. This did not amuse him either, so with a sigh for Saki's sake I desisted. We must accept with resignation the opinion of the hundred-per-cent American that the English have no sense of humour.

At meal times the captain sat at the head of the table, and two priests on one side of him and Elfenbein and I on the other.

The captain, a jovial little grey-headed man from Bordeaux, was retiring at the end of the year to make his own wine in his own vineyard.

"Je vous enverrai un fût, mon père," he promised the elderly priest.

Elfenbein spoke fluent and bad French. He seized the conversation and held it. Pep, that's what he'd got. The Frenchmen were polite to him, but it was not hard to see that they heartily disliked him. Many of his remarks were singularly tactless, and when he used obscene language in addressing the boy who was serving us the priests looked down their noses and pretended not to hear. But Elfenbein was argumentative, and at one luncheon began to talk of religion. He made a number of observations upon the Catholic faith which were certainly not in good taste. The younger priest flushed and was about to make some observation, when the elder said something to him in an undertone and he held his tongue. But when Elfenbein addressed a direct question to him the old man answered him mildly.

"There is no compulsion in these matters. Everyone is at liberty to believe what he pleases."

Elfenbein made a long tirade, but it was received in silence. He was not abashed. He told me afterwards that they couldn't answer his arguments.

"I don't think they chose to," I said. "I imagine they merely thought you a very rude, vulgar, and ill-mannered fellow."

"Me?" he cried in astonishment.

"They are perfectly inoffensive and they have devoted their lives to what they think is the service of God; why should you gratuitously insult them?"

"I wasn't insultin' them. I was only puttin' my point of view as a rational man. I wanted to start an argument. D'you think I've hurt their feelings? Why, I wouldn't do that for the world, brother."

His surprise was so ingenuous that I laughed.

"You've sneered at what they look upon as most holy. They probably think you're a very ignorant and uneducated man; otherwise I fancy they'd think you were trying deliberately to insult them."

His face fell. I really think he was under the impression that he had been pleasantly facetious. He looked at the old priest, who was sitting in a corner reading his breviary, and went up to him.

"Father, my friend here says I hurt your feelings by what I said. I hadn't any wish to do no such thing. I beg you to pardon me if I said anythin' to offend you."

The priest looked up and smiled.

"Do not mention it, monsieur, it was of no consequence."

"I guess I must make up somehow, Father, and if you'd allow me I'd like to make a contribution to your fund for the poor. I've got a lot of piastres that I didn't have time to change at Haiphong and if you'll accept them you'll be doin' me a favour."

Before the priest could answer he had pulled out of his trouser pocket a wad of notes and a handful of silver and put them down on the table.

"But that is very kind of you," said the priest. "This is a large sum."

"Take it, it's no good to me, I should only lose on the exchange if I turned it into real money at Hong Kong. You'll do me a favour by takin' it."

It was really a considerable amount and the priest looked at it with some embarrassment.

"Our mission is very poor. We shall be extremely grateful. I hardly know how to thank you. I don't know what I can do."

"Well, I'm an atheist, Father, but if you like to remember me in your prayers next time you say them I guess it won't harm me any, an' if you'd add the name of my mother Rachel Obermeyer Kahanski I reckon we'd be about even-stepen."

Elfenbein lumbered back to the table at the end of which I was sitting, drinking a glass of brandy with my coffee.

"I made it all right with him. Least I could do, wasn't it? Listen, brother, I've got quite an assortment of men's garters in one of my trunks. You come along down to my state-room and I'll give you a dozen pairs."

His round took him from Batavia to Yokohama and he had been travelling, now for one firm now for another, for twenty years.

"Tell me," I said now, "you must have known an awful lot of people, what opinion have you formed of the human race?"

"Sure I'll tell you. I think they're bully. You'd be surprised at the kindness I've received from everybody. If you're ill or anythin' like that, perfect strangers will nurse you like your own mother. White, yellow, or brown, they're all alike. It's surprisin' what they'll do for you. But they're stupid, they're terribly stupid. They've got no more brains than a turnip. They can't even tell you the way in their own home town. I'll give you my opinion of the human race in a nutshell, brother; their heart's in the right place, but their head's a thoroughly inefficient organ."

This really is the end of this book.

DON FERNANDO

DON FERNANDO

I

I WAS living in Seville at the time, in the street called Guzman el Bueno, and whenever I went out or came home I passed Don Fernando's tavern. When, my morning's work done, I had gone for a stroll down the gay and crowded Sierpes, I found it very pleasant to drop in for a glass of *manzanilla* on my way back to luncheon; and in the cool of the evening, walking my horse over the dangerous cobbles after a ride in the country, I would often stop, call the boy to hold the horse, and step in. The tavern was no more than a long low room with doors on two sides of it, for it was at the corner of a street; the bar ran down the length of the room and behind it were the barrels of wine from which Don Fernando served you. From the ceiling hung bunches of Spanish onions, strings of sausages, and hams from Granada, which Don Fernando always said were the best in Spain. I think his custom was chiefly among the servants of the neighbourhood. This district of Santa Cruz was then the most elegant in Seville. Tortuous white streets, with large houses, and here and there a church. It was strangely deserted. If you went out in the morning you might see a lady in black, with her maid, going to Mass; sometimes a huckster passed along with his donkey, his wares in great open panniers; or a beggar, stopping at house after house, who raised his voice at each *reja*, the wrought-iron gate that led into the patio, and begged for alms with the phrase of immemorial usage. At nightfall the ladies who had been driving in the Paseo in a landau drawn by two horses came home again and the streets resounded with the clatter of the horses' hooves. Then all again grew silent. This was many years ago. I write of the last years of the nineteenth century.

Don Fernando was small even for a Spaniard, but he was very fat. His round brown face shone with sweat and he had always two days' growth of beard. Never more and never less. I do not know how he managed it. He was incredibly dirty. He had large black shining eyes, with extremely long lashes, and they were at the same time sharp, good-natured, and gay. He was a wag and he enjoyed his own dry humour. He spoke in the soft Andalusian

Spanish from which the Moorish influence has eliminated the harshness of Castile and it was not till I had learnt the language pretty well that I found him easy to understand. He was an *aficionado* of the bull-ring and it was his boast that the great Guerrita came in now and then to drink a glass of wine with him. He was a bachelor and lived alone with a scrubby, pale-faced boy whom he had got from the orphanage and who did the cooking, washed the glasses, and swept the floor. This boy had the most pronounced squint I ever saw.

But Don Fernando did not only sell you as good a glass of *manzanilla* as you could get in Seville; he also dealt in curios. That was why I dropped in to see him so often. You never knew what he might have to show you. I suppose the things came through a confidential servant from the houses in the neighbourhood. Their owners, temporarily embarrassed, were too proud to take them to a shop. They were for the most part small and easily portable, pieces of silver, lace, old fans with sticks of mother-of-pearl decorated with gold, crucifixes, paste ornaments, and antique rings of baroque design. Don Fernando seldom acquired a piece of furniture; but when he did, a *bargueño* or a pair of straight-backed chairs, with leather seats and all studded with nails, he would keep it upstairs in the bedroom he shared with the foundling. I had very little money and he knew I could only buy trifles, but he loved to show his purchases and two or three times he took me up into his room. The windows were closed to keep out the heat by day and the noxious airs by night and it was filthy. It stank. In opposite corners of the room were two small iron beds, unmade at whatever time of day you went in, and the sheets looked as though they had not been washed for months. The floor was strewn with cigarette-ends. Don Fernando's eyes would shine more brightly than ever when he passed his grubby, podgy hand over the wood of a chair that had been polished by the usage of three centuries. He would spit on the dusty gilt surface of a tabernacle and rub the place with his finger to show you with delight the fine quality of the gold. Sometimes, while you stood at the bar, he would fish out from behind it the pieces of a pair of ear-rings, those old heavy Spanish ear-rings in three tiers, and assemble them delicately so that you might admire the beauty of the paste and the elegance of the setting. He had a way of handling these things, sensual and tender, that showed you more than any words he might have spoken how profound a feeling he had for

them. When he flicked open an old fan, with the peculiar click that the Spanish woman gives, and fanned himself, an old fan a great lady in her mantilla had flaunted at a bull-fight when Charles III was King of Spain, you could not but feel that, ignorant though he was, he had some vague, delightful emotion of the past.

Don Fernando bought cheaply and sold cheaply; and so, after bargaining for days, often for weeks, which I think we both enjoyed, I was able to get from him little by little a number of objects which were not of the smallest use to me, but which I hankered after because their associations appealed to my fancy. So I bought the fans that pretty women, dead a hundred and fifty years ago, had flirted, the ear-rings they wore in their ears, the fantastic rings they wore on their fingers, and the crucifixes they hung in their rooms. It was junk and in the passage of time it has all been stolen, lost, or given away. Of all I bought from Don Fernando I have now nothing but a book, and that I did not want and bought against my will. One day as I stepped across the threshold Don Fernando addressed me forthwith.

"I've got something for you," he said. "I bought it especially for you."

"What is it?"

"A book."

He opened a drawer in the bar and brought out a little squat volume bound in parchment. My face fell.

"I don't want that."

"But look at it. It's an old book. It's more than three hundred years old."

He opened it and showed me the title page. There it was all right, the date 1586, with the imprint of Madrid and the publisher's name: *Por la viuda de Alonso Gomez Impressor de la C.R.M.*

"It doesn't cost anything," he went on. "I'll give it you for fifty pesetas."

"But I don't want it at any price."

"It's a celebrated book. When it was brought to me I said to myself, 'Don Guillermo will like that. He's an educated man'."

"My eye and Betty Martin." (Not many people know the Spanish for that.) "Sell it to somebody else. I'm not a book collector. I only buy books to read."

"But why shouldn't you read this? It's very interesting."

"Not to me."

"A book three hundred years old? Come, man, don't say things

like that to me. Look, there's writing on the margins in places and there's writing on the back page. That shows you it's old."

It was true that some reader had written notes here and there in a hand that might very well have been that of the seventeenth century, but I could not decipher a word. I turned a few pages. It was beautifully printed on strong, fine paper, but the type was so close-set that it was difficult to read. The old spelling, the abbreviations, I noticed, made it hard to understand. I shook my head firmly and handed the book back to Don Fernando.

"You can have it for forty pesetas. I paid thirty-five for it myself."

"I wouldn't have it as a gift."

He shrugged his shoulders with a sigh and put the book away.

A few days later I happened to pass the tavern on horseback and Don Fernando, who was standing at the doorway sucking a toothpick, called me.

"Come in a moment; I've got something to say to you."

I dismounted and gave the bridle to the boy. Don Fernando put the book in my hands.

"I'll give it you for thirty pesetas. I lose five on it, but I want you to have it."

"But I don't want the book," I cried.

"Twenty-five pesetas."

"No."

"You needn't read it. Put it in your library."

"I haven't got a library."

"But you ought to have a library. Start your library with this book. It's a beautiful book."

"It isn't a beautiful book."

And it wasn't. Even though I knew I should never read it I might have been tempted if it had been bound in leather with a coat of arms in gold, a handsome folio with wide margins. But it was an ugly little volume, much too thick for its height, and the parchment with which it was bound was crinkled and yellow. I was determined not to have the book. Don Fernando, I do not know why, was determined that I should; and after that I never went into the tavern without his attacking me. He flattered me, he cajoled me, he threw himself on my mercy, he appealed to my sense of justice; he came down in his price to twenty pesetas, to ten, but I stood firm. Then one day he got hold of a wooden statuette of St. Anthony, obviously of the seventeenth century,

beautifully carved and painted, that I immediately set my heart on. We bargained over it for several weeks until at last we arrived somewhere near the price that he was prepared to let it go for and that I was able to pay. The difference between us was only twenty pesetas. I forget the exact sum. I think he was asking a hundred and thirty pesetas and I was offering a hundred and ten.

"Give me a hundred and thirty for the statue and the book," he said, "and you'll never regret it."

"Curse the book!" I cried in exasperation.

I paid for my drink and walked to the door. Don Fernando called me back.

"Listen," he said.

I turned round. He came towards me, an ingratiating smile on his fat, red lips, with the statuette in one hand and the book in the other.

"I'll give you the statuette for a hundred and twenty pesetas and I'll make you a present of the book."

A hundred and twenty pesetas was the price I had all along made up my mind to give.

"I'll pay that," I said, "but you can keep the book."

"It's a present."

"I don't want a present."

"But I want to make you one. It's a pleasure for me. You can't refuse a present. Come, man."

I sighed. I was beaten. I was a trifle ashamed.

"I'll give you twenty pesetas for the book."

"Even at that it's a present," he said. "You could sell it in Madrid for two hundred."

He wrapped it up in a dirty piece of newspaper; I paid my money, and with the book in my hand and the statuette under my arm walked home.

II

IN course of time I gathered together something of a library and the little squat book that Don Fernando forced upon me found its place in it. Because of its shape and its parchment binding among the paper covers of my foreign books and the multi-coloured cloth of the English ones it often caught my eye. It did not irritate me, for it reminded me of Don Fernando's tavern, the

streets of Seville in summer (the glare mitigated by the awnings stretched across them), and the cool, dry taste of *manzanilla*; but I never thought of reading it. And then one rainy afternoon when I was browsing among my books I happened to notice it and took it from the shelf. I turned over a few pages idly. I thought I would read a paragraph and see what I could make of it. But the paragraph was six pages long. I did not find it so hard to understand as I had expected. The long s's were a bit of a bother, and the n's, omitted according to no obvious plan, were indicated by a little squiggle over the preceding letter; v in the middle of a word was replaced by u, and at the beginning sometimes by b. This reproduced the pronunciation of the sixteenth century. But, unfamiliar with this as I was, it was something of a facer when I had to guess that the word spelt *boluer* must be read *volver*. There were many abbreviations and the spelling was archaic. But I found that if I read with attention there was no great difficulty to overcome and the author seemed to me to write with perspicuity. He said what he had to say briefly. I turned back and started at the beginning.

The story I read was strange. Its hero was the youngest son of the thirteen children of Don Beltran Yañez de Oñaz and his wife Doña Maria Saez de Balda. Don Beltran was the head of an ancient and illustrious house, and his wife was his equal in birth and virtue. They were related to the greatest families in the province of Guipuzcoa. This is one of the pleasantest parts of Spain, a hilly country, with green, fertile valleys through which run bubbling crystalline streams. The cold in winter is tolerable and in summer the air is cool and fresh. Don Beltran's house, still extant, stands in a long, narrow valley closed in by hills in front and by hills behind. But the view, though thus confined, is spacious. The summits of the hills are bare and stony, but trees grow on the sides, and on the lower slopes are patches of pasture, maize, and corn. It is a smiling, richly coloured scene. A little river runs through the valley and it may be supposed that it was for the convenience of this that the house was built at that spot. But the times were troublous and though no longer the fortress that had been destroyed by order of King Henry the Fourth and the Brotherhoods of Guipuzcoa, it could be defended in case of need. It is a square building, the lower part (the remains of the fourteenth-century stronghold) of grey untrimmed stone, but the upper part, built a century later in a less warlike manner, is of

brick, with the little pepper-pot towers called bartizans decorating the four corners. It is not very large; in England it would seem a country house of but moderate size, and Don Beltran and his wife, with their large family and the number of servants that their station demanded, must have been somewhat crowded. Don Beltran was a man of consequence and his heir, Don Martin, married Doña Magdalena d'Araoz, maid of honour to Queen Isabella the Catholic, who gave her as a wedding-present a painting of the Annunciation. A few days after the bride arrived in her new home she was surprised to find the picture bathed in sweat. The miracle caused great surprise to all the members of the family, and Don Pedro Lopez, her husband's brother and a priest, proposed that the picture should be transferred to the village church for the veneration of the faithful. But Don Martin, unwilling to part with so great a treasure, offered instead to build a chapel in the house, where the miraculous painting might be suitably enshrined.

The youngest son of Don Beltran, the hero of the story I read, was christened Íñigo. When little more than a child he was sent by his father to court and here entered the service of Don Juan Velazquez de Cuellar, treasurer to the Catholic Kings. Service was an honourable calling. Men of rank thought it no disgrace to place their sons in the households of great noblemen. They waited at table, made the beds, lit the fires, swept the floors, and fetched and carried for their masters. Don Juan Velazquez was Governor of Arevalo in the province of Avila, one of the cities left by Juan II of Castile to his widow, the mother of Isabella. The arms of Arevalo show a battlemented wall and a plumed knight in full armour on horseback, with his lance at rest. Here the young Íñigo learnt manners, the usages of the world, and such accomplishments as became a gentleman. Growing to man's estate, with the example before him of his brothers, who were goodly men, and urged by his own gallant spirit, he applied himself to the exercise of arms. He sought to excel his equals and to achieve a reputation for valour. But his biographer passes over this period briefly. It is only from his own casual remarks made in after life that he is known to have been quick to defend his honour when the occasion arose, to have loved the chase, and to have been something of a gambler. He was a young man of a comely person, not very tall, but well-made, with small feet of which he was not a little proud; he admitted in later years that he liked to wear boots that

were too tight for him. He had beautiful hair, of a chestnut colour with a reddish glint in it, and his brown eyes were large, moving, and wonderfully eloquent. His skin was white. His nose was hooked; it was the most noticeable feature of his face, but it was not so large as to be a disfigurement. He wore with grace the rich clothes of the court. For the sober habit which the economical spirit of Ferdinand the Catholic had, except on occasions of state, made usual gave way with the arrival of Philip the Handsome, and his Flemish followers, to fashions of great extravagance. Don Iñigo was of an amorous complexion and is reputed to have been the lover of Germaine de Foix, the young wife whom Ferdinand, notwithstanding his name of the Prudent, married after the death of Isabella. The French chronicler describes her as "*bonne et fort belle princesse*", but another contemporary, a Spaniard, states that she was ill-favoured and lame. He was possibly prejudiced. "This lady introduced into Castile magnificent dinners, albeit the Castilians and even their Kings are very moderate in this matter," he says severely. "Whoever spent money on parties and banquets for her was her friend." She was but eighteen when she married (Ferdinand being fifty-four) and it is not strange if she liked to amuse herself. Don Iñigo fell passionately in love with her. He wore her colours and composed madrigals in her honour. He was a very proper gentleman.

He lived a life of ease and gallantry till the age of twenty-seven, when, King Ferdinand being dead and his widow remarried, he entered the service of Don Antonio Manrique, Duke of Najera, a patron of his house. He took part in various campaigns. He was ambitious and energetic. He had a native gift for the managing of men so that the Duke of Najera employed him in affairs that needed discretion. On one occasion he sent him on a mission to reconcile contending factions in Guipuzcoa, and Don Iñigo succeeded in settling the matters in dispute to the satisfaction of all concerned. Charles V began his reign over Spain with a series of mistakes that drove his new subjects to revolt. The King of France seized the opportunity to declare war on his rival and a French army entered Navarre. The Duke of Najera, who was in command of the Spanish troops, leaving a garrison in the city of Pampeluna, evacuated the country. The French laid siege to the city, and the officers of the garrison, among whom was Don Iñigo, seeing no help for it, were of a mind to capitulate; but Don Iñigo opposed the common judgment and by his eloquence filled them

with his own spirit so that they determined to resist to the death. But in the course of an assault he was hit by a cannon-ball in the right leg, and a splinter of stone from the wall at the same time wounded his other leg also. He fell, and the garrison who had been sustained by his courage lost heart and surrendered.

The French entered the city. When they came upon Don Iñigo and discovered who he was they were moved to compassion and tended his wounds. So that he might be better taken care of, the French commander with generous courtesy gave orders that as soon as it was possible he should be borne back to his own house in a litter. But no sooner was he there than his wounds, especially that on his right leg, grew worse. The surgeons formed the opinion that in order to set it properly the bone must be broken again. This was done, to the great pain of the sick man, but during the operation he neither changed colour, groaned, nor said a word that discovered want of courage. He did not mend, however, and little hope remained that he would recover. He was told of his danger, whereupon he confessed and received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. But that night, St. Peter, for whom he had always had a devotion, appeared to him and restored him to health. His bones began to set and he grew stronger. Twenty splinters of bone had been removed from his leg, so that it was shorter than the other and mis-shapen; and he could neither walk nor stand. Below the knee a piece of bone protruded in an unsightly manner and this distressed him so much that he asked the surgeons how it might be remedied. They told him that the excrescence could be cut away, but it would cause him greater anguish than he had ever endured in his life. His intention was to proceed with the career of arms; he was vain, he wanted to wear the smart boots that were then in fashion; and so notwithstanding their hesitation he insisted that the operation should be performed. He would not consent to be tied down, thinking this unworthy of his generous soul, and bore the suffering without a movement and without a murmur. The deformity was removed and then by means of wheels and other instruments, which caused him horrible pain, the leg was gradually stretched and straightened. But it never attained the same length as the other and he limped ever afterwards.

To pass the tedious hours of his convalescence he asked for the novels of chivalry, which he was fond of reading, but it happened that there were none in the house. He was given what books there

were, and these were a life of Christ and the stories of the saints which were known as *Flos Sanctorum*. He began to read, carelessly enough, but in a little while was deeply moved, and presently there arose in him a desire to imitate the great deeds of which he read. But he could not at once forget the past and he was beset by memories of his warlike exploits, the pleasant occupations of the court, and thoughts of love. God and the Devil contended for his soul. But he noticed that when he thought of things divine he was filled with exultation, and contrariwise when he thought of things of the world, with discontent. That was enough. He determined to alter his life. His bitterest torment was the love that he sought in vain to tear out of his yearning heart; and one night, when he rose from his bed to pray, as was his frequent habit, the Queen of Heaven, with the child in her arms, appeared to him. From that time he was freed from the sensual thoughts that had vexed him, so that to the end of his life he preserved the chastity of his soul without stain.

His elder brother and the people of the house saw that he was different, for though he kept his secret his manner was changed. They must indeed have guessed that something very odd was going on, for when the young soldier finally made up his mind to follow in the footsteps of Jesus the house was rocked with a great crash and the stout stone wall was split through its entire thickness. It was observed that he read a great deal (an occupation naturally unfitting to a man of his birth) and prayed, and no longer cared to jest; his speech was grave and measured, of spiritual things, and he wrote much. He had a book elegantly bound and in this, for he was a good scribe, wrote down the most remarkable sayings and deeds of Jesus, of Mary, and of the saints. He wrote those of Jesus in letters of gold, those of his blessed mother in letters of blue, and those of the other saints in other colours according to his devotion to them. He found satisfaction in these pursuits, but in none greater than in the contemplation of the sky and the stars. It stimulated him to contempt of all mutable things which are beneath them and enflamed his love of God. This habit never left him and his biographer relates how in old age when he could behold the heavens from some height he would remain absorbed in the sight so that he seemed transported. When he returned to himself the tears poured from his eyes with the delight that filled his heart and he said, "How vile and base appears the earth when I look at the sky; it is but mud and dung." He re-

solved to go to Jerusalem as soon as he had recovered his health. Till this was possible he decided with fasting, penitences of various kinds, and corporal punishment to persecute his flesh. He sought a manner of life in which, stamping earthly things and the vanities of the world beneath his feet, he might castigate himself with such rigour as to give satisfaction to his Redeemer.

When at last he was sufficiently well to set out on his pilgrimage, Don Iñigo, knowing that it would arouse opposition in his family, gave as a pretext for leaving home his desire to visit his protector, the Duke of Najera, who had sent several times during his illness to inquire after him. But his elder brother, Don Martin, suspecting that the journey he was taking had another motive than civility, called him aside.

"All things are great in you, my brother," he said, "your intelligence, your judgment, your courage, your birth, your appearance, your influence with the great, the goodwill in which this country holds you, the use and experience of war, sense and prudence, your age, which is now in the flower of youth, and the great expectations, founded on these facts, which all men have of you. So how can you for a whim, deceiving our well-founded hopes, make fools of us all, and dispossess our house of the trophies of your victories and of the profits and rewards that should ensue from your labours? I have one advantage only over you, that I was born before you; but in everything else I recognise that you excel me. Look, I beg you, brother dearer than my life, look what you do and adopt not a course that will not only cheat us of our hopes, but will also cast upon our lineage perpetual infamy and disgrace."

Don Iñigo answered in few words. He said that he would not forget that he was well-born, and he promised to do nothing to bring dishonour on his house. He set out accompanied by two servants, but, giving them presents, soon afterwards dismissed them. His immediate destination was Monserrat. From the day he left his father's house he scourged himself every night. He desired to do great and difficult things and he mortified his body with severity, because the saints whose example he sought to follow had thus acquitted themselves. In this he aimed not so much at atoning for his sins, as at pleasing God. At a certain place along the road he was overtaken by a Moor, of whom at that time there were still many in the kingdoms of Valencia and Aragón, and they rode for a space together. They began to talk

and presently discussed the virginity of Our Lady. The Moor admitted that she had enjoyed this blessed state before and at the birth of Jesus, but denied that she had retained it afterwards. Don Iñigo did all he could to undeceive him, but, such was his knavishness, he would not listen to reason. The Moor rode on, leaving Don Iñigo much perplexed; he could not decide whether his faith, and Christian charity, did not demand that he should pursue the fellow and stab him to the death for his audacity. He was a soldier, punctilious in the point of honour, and he took it as a personal affront that an enemy of the faith should venture in his presence to speak with disrespect of the Queen of Heaven. After anxious consideration he decided to leave the matter to the arbitrament of God; he made up his mind to go on his way till he came to a cross-road and there drop the reins on his horse's neck. If the horse took the road along which the Moor had gone he would follow and kill him. But if the horse took the other road he would let him be. Thus he did and the horse, leaving on one side the broad and flat road along which the Moor had ridden, chose the other. God had spoken. Arriving at length in the neighbourhood of Monserrat, Don Iñigo reached a village where he provided himself with what little he needed for his pilgrimage. He bought a tunic of rough, coarse stuff that reached to his feet, a piece of rope for a belt, espadrilles, a staff, and a drinking-vessel.

Monserrat was a Benedictine monastery famous for the miracles that were constantly worked there and for the great concourse of people that came from all parts to ask favours of the Holy Virgin. Don Iñigo on his arrival sought out a confessor. He made a general confession that lasted three days. He then gave his horse to the monastery, and laid his sword and his dagger before the altar of Our Lady. When the night came he went to a poor man and giving him all his clothes, even his shirt, dressed himself in the coarse habit he had bought. And because he had read in the books of chivalry that it was the custom of new-made knights to keep vigil over their arms, Don Iñigo, the new-made knight of Christ, spent the night watching before the image of the Blessed Virgin, and bitterly weeping for his sins resolved to amend his life from then on. Before dawn, so that none should know whither he went, he abandoned the high road that led to Barcelona (whence it would have been natural to take ship for Italy) and with all speed started for a village in the mountains called Manresa. He wore his pilgrim clothes, but since his wound still troubled him

he had one foot shod. But he had not gone a league before he found that a man was following him and calling. The man asked him if it was true that he had given his rich clothes to a beggar. For, finding him with them and thinking he had stolen them, they had cast the fellow into prison. Don Iñigo confessed that he had indeed given him the clothes, but when the man asked him who he was and whence he came he would not answer.

At Manresa, concealing his birth and the manner of his life aforetime, he took up his abode in the hospital of the poor; and because in the world he had been careful of his person and vain of his beautiful hair, which he had been accustomed to wear long, now he neglected it and went barehead. He allowed his beard and nails to grow. Every day he scourged himself three times and spent seven hours on his knees. Every day he went to Mass, to vespers, and to compline. Every day he begged for alms. But he neither ate meat nor drank wine; he lived on bread and water. He slept on the ground, passing the greater part of the night in prayer. He was careful to deny himself everything that could be of pleasure to his body, and though he was a robust man and a strong one in a little while the severity of his mortifications reduced him to very great weakness. But one day in the hospital with that beggarly crew, amid squalor and filth, he asked himself: "What are you doing in this stench and vileness? Why do you go dressed so poorly and in so disgraceful a fashion? Do you not see that by consorting with people so base, and behaving like one of them, you obscure the greatness of your lineage?" He knew it was the voice of the Devil and drew nearer still to the poor people and constrained himself to use them in a more friendly way. Another day, worn out and tired, the thought came to him that it was impossible for him to endure, for seventy years it might be, a life worse than a savage's, so harsh and wretched. "And what," he answered, "are seventy years of penitence compared with eternity?" After a time the peace of soul that had been his comfort deserted him and he felt a great dryness in his heart; his spirit seemed constricted and he prayed without satisfaction or relief. He was seized with scruples that in his general confession he had not said all that he should have said. His conscience smote him so that, tortured with anxiety, he passed his nights in bitter tears. On one occasion, when he had left the hospital and was living in a Dominican monastery, his despair was such that he was tempted to throw himself out of the window of his cell. It was then that it

profited him to have read the *Flos Sanctorum*, for he remembered the example of a saint who, wanting something from God, decided to fast till it was vouchsafed him; and in imitation Don Iñigo made up his mind neither to eat nor drink till he secured the peace of mind he desired. Nothing passed his lips for a week, during which time he continued to pray for seven hours a day on his knees, scourged himself thrice daily and performed the other devotions that he was used to. At the end of it he found himself strong enough to continue, but his confessor ordered him to eat and refused to give him absolution till he did. He broke his fast and in a short while was completely delivered of his scruples; he buried the memory of his past sins and was never more troubled by them.

Further mercies were then vouchsafed to the penitent. One day, being in prayer on the steps of the church of St. Dominic, his spirit was lifted up and he saw, as with his eyes, the form of the Holy Trinity. The vision filled him with such great comfort that he could neither think nor speak of anything else. He expounded the mystery with such an abundance of reasons, similes, and examples that all who heard him were overcome with admiration and surprise. Often, while praying, he perceived the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ and sometimes also the glorious and blessed Virgin Mary. One day, walking a little way out of Manresa, occupied with the contemplation of divine things, he sat down by the side of a stream and gazed at the flowing water; on a sudden his eyes were opened and he saw (not sensibly, but after a higher and more immaterial manner), with a new and unaccustomed light, so that he understood not only the mysteries of the faith, but also the mysteries of all knowledge. He affirmed at the end of his life that none of the knowledge that he had afterwards acquired either by study or by supernatural grace had the fullness of the knowledge he received in that moment of illumination.

One Saturday, occupied as usual with his devotional exercises, he fell into a swoon, and those about him thought he was dead and would have buried him if one, feeling his pulse, had not observed that his heart still beat. He remained in this condition till the following Saturday, when he awoke as from a sweet sleep.

Exhausted by excessive labours of the body and incessant combats of the soul he found himself constrained to rest a little; but visions so wonderful came to him and consolations so sweet, he was unable to give to sleep even the short time he had assigned to it and passed his nights in transport. He fell so seriously ill that

his life was despaired of. As he prepared himself for death Satan suggested to him the notion that being a just and pious man he need not fear. It terrified him and with all his might he fought against it, trying by the recollection of his past sins to wrench out of his heart the devilish hope in the mercy of God; and when he was well enough to speak he begged those who were present when they saw him in the agony of death with great care to say to him: "O miserable sinner, O luckless man, remember the evil thou hast done and the offences with which thou hast called down on thee the anger of God." Having somewhat recovered he immediately resumed his accustomed penances and his austere mode of life. Striving with indefatigable determination to conquer himself, he laid upon his weary body burdens greater than it could bear and he fell gravely ill a second and a third time. At last experience, and a great pain in his stomach, combined with the rigour of the weather, for it was winter, persuaded him at least to clothe himself sufficiently to keep out the cold. In this manner he lived for the greater part of a year and then the time arrived when he was ready to start on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There were some who offered to bear him company and others who advised him not to attempt so long and arduous a journey without someone who knew Italian or Latin to serve as a guide and interpreter. But he desired to be alone with God so that he might enjoy communion with Him without let or hindrance. He placed his confidence in Him and he was unwilling to betray it by relying on the assistance of another. He set out for Barcelona and his distant goal with no other company than God's.

Such was the early life of Don Iñigo de Oñaz, a Spanish gentleman, known to history as Saint Ignatius Loyola. The reader will long since have guessed it, for the tale I have told is well known. The book that Don Fernando made me, all unwilling, buy was the life that was written of him not long after his death by Father Pedro de Ribadeneyra of the Company of Jesus.

III

I HAD long known Pampeluna. It stands on a height and is surrounded by low hills. They are pale under the blue sky. Their sides are cultivated and here and there are patches of maize, then patches of dry earth where the wheat has been gathered; but it

must need incessant labour for the peasant to wring from that stony soil his difficult living. There are few trees in the plain but poplars. There is a small wood where they stand, side by side, but a little scattered, with a sort of shy eagerness. They make you think of a group of slim seminarists gathered about the door of the lecture hall to applaud the doctor of divinity who has just won a notable victory for the faith.

Pampeluna is a provincial town of no great size and it has little to attract the visitor. The Plaza de la Constitución has been renamed Plaza de la Republica. In the cafés that surround it, before an empty glass, under awnings, the inhabitants sit all day long. In the centre is a bandstand and here without doubt will one day have place the statue of the first president of the republic. The narrow, winding streets of the medieval city have been broadened and straightened and there are plate-glass windows in the shops. The houses have *miradores* in which hour after hour women sit, looking down on the street below, sewing and gossiping. Overhead is a spider's web of telegraph wires, telephone lines, and electric light cables. No longer does each craft occupy its particular quarter, but on the rampart behind the cathedral you may still see the rope-makers making rope in the same way as they have for centuries, oiling their shuttles from oil in a cow's horn, and the makers of espadrilles sewing as though for dear life; which indeed they are.

From morning till late into the night there is a ceaseless din. The toot of motor-horns, the splutter of exhausts and the tinkling of bicycle-bells, the rumble of carts over cobbled stones, the braying of asses and the clatter of hooves, the playing of pianos and the harsh clamour of gramophones; and above all, a continuous accompaniment, the piercing sound of voices raised in animated conversation. At the spot where Ignatius received his wound they have built a chapel and next to it a church. In the chapel is a picture in which you see the saint, no saint then, lying on the ground while his companions attend to his wounded leg. A man on a white horse watches the scene with indifference, but above the wounded hero an angel hovers, a prey to agitation. In the background is the city's formidable wall. The church is uglier than any church I have ever seen. Its decorations remind you of those of the scent shops in the Rue de la Paix. It is spick and span, and looks as though it had cost any amount of money. I cannot believe that religious art has ever sunk lower than this; and that an earthquake has not levelled it with the ground must seem to

the good Catholic a very signal instance of the infinite patience of God. Large parts of the walls have been demolished for the expansion of the city, but such parts as remain are impressive. They were rebuilt, it appears, by Philip II and the city since then has proved impregnable. At their base a little river runs. It is bordered by a meadow in which trees grow, affording a grateful shade, and here groups of people, some on the bank fishing, others sitting down engaged in conversation, make a pleasant picture that reminds you of a painting by one of the French impressionists.

But I had never been to Loyola, Azpeitia, or Manresa, all three closely associated with the founder of the Company of Jesus, and these after reading his life I made it my business to visit. It was at Azpeitia that Don Iñigo was baptised and in the church you are shown the font at which the ceremony was performed. It has been smartened up with wooden decorations and a carved top. On each side are stone fonts at which it was hoped later inhabitants of the neighbourhood would have their children christened, but they have continued to insist on using that which the saint had exalted. The sacristan tells you with indulgence that they hope thus to enable their offspring to partake of his sanctity. Loyola is less than a mile away and now a broad avenue of trees conducts you to it. As you drive up you come to a statue of Saint Ignatius. The fine portico of the basilica faces you. This is in the Jesuit style of the seventeenth century, somewhat highly decorated, and a flight of steps leads up to it. The interior has a massive nobility. On the left, enclosed in great stone buildings, is the ancestral house of the Loyolas. The exterior has kept its old appearance, but the rooms within have been converted into chapels; the walls are lined with marble and the windows are of coloured glass. An imposing flight of stairs has replaced the old one and the wooden balusters are in the flamboyant style of the 'eighties. On an upper floor you are shown the little room which Don Iñigo as a child shared with one of his brothers. Next door to it is a low, wide chamber, with great beams, in which he read and prayed during his convalescence. Here, on a gold settle, is a statue of him in his best clothes, with a cushion behind him and a book in his hand, in the very act of being converted. There is a marble altar at which the privileged may pray. It is very magnificent and extremely ugly.

After that I went to Manresa. It is pleasant to drive through that sunny country. The colour has not the pastel lightness of French landscapes, but is deeper and richer. The sky is bright blue with

small stationary clouds very white against it. The hills are covered with pine trees and in the sun their green is brilliant. Round the town they are more thinly grown with stunted olives. You accompany a swift little river bordered with bulrushes, poplars, and beech trees, but passing through the town it grows placid, as though in that quiet place it were unseemly to hasten. It is spanned by a slim bridge, plain but very graceful, with a tall arch in the middle rising to a point; and on its banks the houses are huddled together, old tall houses with open loggias in which the washing is hung out to dry.

It was in Manresa that Saint Ignatius wrote the first draft of a little book that has had a prodigious influence. This is the *Spiritual Exercises*. The visitor is shown the cave in which the saint, according to tradition, composed it. It is on the side of a rocky hill and from it you have a splendid prospect of Monserrat, sharp-edged on a clear day, but in the mist strangely mysterious. The cave is shallow, but long and high, rugged, and open to the view. It can never have been a place of extreme seclusion. Now it is guarded by an enormous iron grille and over it is built a Jesuit college and a church. But the Jesuits have been expelled and the buildings are barred and locked.

The book is one that cannot be read without awe. For it must be remembered that it was the efficacious instrument that enabled the Society of Jesus for centuries to maintain its ascendancy. Four hundred commentaries have been written on it; popes, cardinals, and bishops have commended it. Leo XIII said of it: "Here is the sustenance that I desired for my soul." So remarkable did the exercises seem even to the saint's contemporaries, the saint being when he wrote ignorant and unlettered, that a supernatural origin was very generally ascribed to them; and this was substantiated by the Blessed Virgin herself, who appeared to Doña Maria Escobar and in so many words told her that she had been the assistant and instructress of Saint Ignatius in their composition. The illustrious collaborators did not, for some reason, see fit to mention the fact that a Spanish monk, Francisco Garcia de Cisneros, Abbot of Monserrat, had some years before published a similar work with a title that was almost identical; and in Ludolph's *Life of Christ* there are, it appears, so many points in common with the *Spiritual Exercises* that it seems impossible to acquit the authors of plagiarism. This has, to my mind unreasonably, disquieted a good many people. I look upon the offence with indulgence. We writers get

our material from one source and another (*je prends mon bien où je le trouve*) and the fact is, we only acknowledge the debt when we cannot help ourselves. But I see no reason why the Blessed Virgin should not have dictated this interesting material to the Abbot of Monserat and to Ludolph the Carthusian as well as to Saint Ignatius. Authors repeat themselves and when they have got hold of an idea that appeals to them are apt to harp upon it.

The full title is impressive: "*Spiritual Exercises for overcoming oneself and for regulating one's life without being swayed by any inordinate attachment.*" A noble aim! It must be a dull mind that is not curious to see what plan this strange man devised to effect so difficult a process. For, notwithstanding his borrowings, it is clear that this book is the fruit of his own experience. Every page bears the stamp of his ruthless personality.

The exercises are divided into four weeks, but each week may be of shorter or longer duration, and they are performed under the guidance of a director. The root of the matter is told you at once. "Man was created to praise, revere, and serve God our Lord, and thereby to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and to help him in the attainment of the end for which he was created. Hence it follows that man should make use of creatures so far as they help him towards his end, and should withdraw from them so far as they are a hindrance to him in regard to that end. Wherefore it is necessary that we should acquire detachment from all created things (in all that is left to the liberty of our free will and is not forbidden it), so that we on our part should not wish for health rather than sickness, for wealth rather than poverty, for honour rather than shame, for a long life rather than a short one, and so in all other matters, solely desiring and choosing those things that may better lead us to the end for which we were created."

A number of precepts are given to enable the exercitant to acquire concentration and so achieve what he desires.

"... after going to bed, when I am composing myself to sleep, for the interval of one Hail Mary to think of the hour at which I should rise, and to what purpose, recapitulating the exercise that I have to make.

"... When I awake . . . immediately to advert to what I am about to contemplate in the first exercise at midnight, moving myself to confusion over those many sins of mine, proposing

examples, as if some knight were being arraigned before his king and his full assembled court, stricken with shame and confusion at having grievously offended him of whom he had hitherto received many gifts and many favours."

Before the exercitant reaches the place where he is to make his meditation he is bidden to stand for the space of a *Pater Noster*, with mind uplifted; then he enters upon his meditation, "now kneeling, now prostrate on the ground, now lying back with uplifted face, now sitting, now standing." When it is finished he is to spend a quarter of an hour, sitting or walking, during which he must consider what success he has had in it. He is ordered to avoid thinking of agreeable subjects, since the feeling of grief for his sins is hindered by any consideration of joy. He must deprive himself of all bright light, closing shutters and doors, except when he is praying, reading, and eating. He is not to laugh or to say anything to provoke laughter. He is enjoined to do penance: interior penance, which is to grieve over his sins, with the firm purpose of not committing them or any others again; and exterior penance, which is chastisement for sins committed. This is taken in three ways. "The first regards food: that is to say, when we take away superfluities, it is not penance but temperance; penance is when we take away from what is fitting that we should have; and the more and more, the greater and better the penance, provided the constitution be not impaired nor notable infirmity ensue. The second way regards our amount of sleep; and in like manner it is not penance to take away superfluity of things delicate or soft, but it is penance when, in the measure of sleep that we allow ourselves, something is taken away from what is fitting. . . . The third way is to chastise the flesh, to wit, by putting it to sensible pain, which is inflicted by wearing hair shirts, or cords, or iron chains on the bare flesh, by scourging oneself, or wounding oneself, and by other modes of austerities. What seems the more suitable and safe thing in penance is for the pain to be sensible in the flesh, without penetrating to the bones, so that it may cause pain and not injury. Wherefore it seems more fitting to scourge oneself with thin cords, which cause pain externally, rather than in any other way, which may cause serious injury internally."

The exercise begins with a preparatory prayer and two preludes. The first prelude consists in what is called the composition of place. The exercitant forms for himself a picture of the scene which is to be the subject of his meditation, the temple or moun-

tain, for example, where Jesus Christ is found. In meditation of the invisible, as of sins, "the composition will be to see with the eye of the imagination and consider my soul imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole compound self in this vale of tears, as in banishment among brute animals." In the second prelude the exercitant is to ask for what he wishes from the meditation. If his meditation is on the Resurrection he is to ask for joy with Christ rejoicing; if it is on the Passion he is to ask for pains, tears, and torment with Christ tormented. The exercise ends with a colloquy in which the exercitant has to consider himself in the presence of Christ crucified and this is made "as one friend speaks to another, or a servant to his master, now asking some favour, now reproaching oneself for some evil done, now speaking of one's own affairs and asking advice upon them."

A *Pater Noster* brings the exercise to a fit conclusion. The first week contains five exercises. The first of these deals with the sin of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, and the mortal sins of individuals. The second is a consideration of one's own sins. These are repeated during the third and fourth exercises. The fifth is concerned with hell.

I have an edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* in Spanish in which the Editor, Father Ramon Garcia, S.J., has charitably sought to make the way of the exercitant easier by describing for him in considerable detail the composition of place and by giving him the matter of his meditation in such a manner as to make it an intellectual exercise of no great severity. When he comes to the meditation of hell he displays a realistic fancy that is truly Spanish. Hell, he says, is like a very dark prison or a cavern of fire and intolerable smoke. With the eyes of his fancy the penitent must see the terrible flames and the souls enclosed as it were in bodies of fire. "Look," he cries, "look at the unhappy creatures writhing in the burning flames, their hair standing on end, their eyes starting out of their heads, their aspect horrible, biting their hands, and with sweats and anguish of death and a thousand times worse than death. Look at the devils of frightful mien, not now tempting the wretched with thoughts of pleasure, but tormenting them like ruthless torturers. See how they mock and deride them, hit, strike, and tear them with insatiable rage; for they are their slaves and they are in their power for sufferance as in the world they were in their power for sin. Apply your ears and listen to the tumult and perpetual confusion of those infernal dungeons. If when a

house is burnt down the cries and the turmoil are so great, what will be the clamour of these innumerable people who burn in living fire?" Now by an effort of imagination making use of his sense of smell the penitent becomes conscious of the sulphurous smoke and stench of the sink of hell. The pestilential air stinks in his nostrils. It is the rank atmosphere of a prison that has no vent; it is worse than the exhalation of a dungeon; it is far more disgusting than the depth of an open grave. The bodies of the damned are alive with worms and emit more putrescence than corpses, so that one would be enough to poison a whole countryside. "What then will be the stink of this horrible prison crammed with so many abominable bodies? We must reflect that the depth of hell is like a lake of liquid sulphur from which rise heavy vapours, and they, since they have no issue, condense; and this noxious venom, so heavy that it is almost palpable, the wretches with mortal agony continually breathe. That unhappy place is an abyss into which, after the Day of Judgment, will fall the putridity, the poison, and the ordure of the whole extension of the earth so that it will be like an unfathomable latrine in which the condemned will find themselves submerged. Think what will be the stench of so much filth there commingled and agglomerated. Think also of the bitter, stinging tears that perpetually flow from the eyes of the damned, furrowing and burning their faces. If in our own bodies, as the result of a sudden shock, or from a paroxysm of anger, we may have indigestion, effusion of bile, bad blood, bitter taste, stinking breath, cough, nausea, vomiting, and other miseries of great affliction to such as suffer them, and of no little distress and disgust to such as see them, what will be the mouth and breath of the damned? There is nothing in the world so repulsive, nor stink with which it can be compared. To this must be added the worm of conscience that is ever gnawing their entrails and spewing into them bitter gall and constant remorse."

"And what," asks Father Ramon, "shall we say of the thirst and hunger that torment them?" Much. Raging is the thirst caused by the heat and the ceaseless wailing. For centuries the rich miser has had his gullet parched and his tongue hanging out of his mouth with the hankering for a drop of water, and never shall he get it, for in that place there is nothing to drink but gall of dragons, poison of asps, boiling pitch, and liquid sulphur. The miserable creatures are hungry with a brutal hunger and without respite suffer from languor, inanition, and a very active craving to eat

something, but there is nothing for them to eat but wormwood, pitch, and molten lead that burns their entrails.

"Now touch with the touch of imagination the fire that crucifies the souls of the damned. Acute and very fearful is the pain it causes. The fire of this world is like the fire in a picture compared with that; for it is the wrath of God that lights it and maintains it, so that it shall be a terrible instrument of His just vengeance. The damned live plunged in this, like fish in water, or rather (better, says my author) penetrated as by a red-hot coal, the flames entering their throats, veins, muscles, bones, entrails, and all their vitals. It combines and symbolises all the aches and pains that can afflict and torment our flesh and our spirit: wounds, convulsions, agonies, the ills of gout and stone, blows, whippings, chains, gallows, nippers, swords, wheels, and hooks. It likewise torments the soul. One cannot understand how; but this is certain, that, with a formidable activity, it penetrates and atrociously tortures the very spirit; since our faith teaches that the demons also burn and suffer from the pain of fire."

Having given the reader this lively picture of the fate in store for the sinner the author points out that it is everlasting. The damned are eternal not only in their souls but also in their bodies. They will long for death, but death will flee from them; indeed, the rage to destroy themselves will cause them fearful agony since they perceive that they cannot die. Their torments are not only everlasting, but they continue without interruption; they are invariable, without diminution; they do not cease for an hour, for a moment; nor is there any alleviation. And though so long and so unceasing, custom does not mitigate them and so render the suffering less intolerable. Every day they are as new and return with new exacerbation.

Then in a passage that seems to me of considerable power the good Father pauses to consider the meaning of eternity. Eternity lasts for ever. Eternity is unending. "In order to form a conception of so terrible a thing, let us embrace in our imagination any number of years, or millions of years, and we shall find that after they have passed eternity remains entire. As many millions of years may pass over the damned as drops of water have fallen upon the earth, and shall fall to the end of the world, and as many drops of water as there are in all the seas on the planet. As many millions of years as there have been leaves, are or shall be, on all the trees and plants in the world. As many millions of years as

there are rays of the sun, atoms in the air, and sands of the sea. And after there has passed this incalculable number of years, the torments of these unhappy creatures shall continue, as though they were but beginning, as though it were the first day; and eternity and suffering will remain whole as though not one second had passed.

"What do you say to this, my soul? If in your soft bed it is so painful to you to pass a long night of sleeplessness and pain, waiting eagerly for the relief of dawn, what will you feel in that eternal night upon which the dawn never breaks, during which you will never have an instant of refreshment, during which you will never see a ray of hope?"

This meditation ends the first week. The exercitant makes a general confession and receives absolution.

Before going further I should like to narrate a little story that is told by Don José Muñoz San Roman and that the reader can take as he likes. The people of a certain village in Andalusia were tired of the Lenten preacher who sought every year to bring them to repentance with sermons that they knew by heart; so the mayor, to give them a treat, secured for the usual discourses the services of a friar whose fame had reached even that secluded spot. His arrival was awaited with eagerness and all the inhabitants came out into the streets to welcome him. The authorities, lay and ecclesiastical, met him at the railway; and the women of the place, surrounding the mayor's lady, stationed themselves at the foot of the Cross that stood at the entrance to the village. The preacher made his entry amid the acclamations of the multitude. They crowded into the church. So that they should not miss a single one of his winged words they struggled to get as near the pulpit as possible, and when he ascended it a tremor of curiosity and expectation passed through the congregation. His manner was humble as he entered into his exordium and his words were mild; but then raising his voice and changing his tone he gave on a sudden a great cry. Remorse seized and shattered him, anger beetled his brows, terror made him quail, and then again he was suffocated with rage. His gestures were abundant and dramatic. And such was the language with which he described the affronts that were suffered during the Passion by Jesus Christ and the anguish that on their account afflicted the Blessed Virgin that the people were dissolved into bitter and noisy tears. Such was the orator's eloquence and in so vivid colours did he depict the

Passion of the Redeemer that many of the faithful fainted and some had convulsions. The mayor's wife fell to the floor in a fit, to the consternation of those around her and to the mayor's very natural concern. The whole congregation was the prey to an ungovernable agitation.

The preacher at last perceived what was happening. He was very much surprised. The congregation, outraged at the condition to which he had reduced them, were about to rush the pulpit and the unfortunate man hardly knew how to stem the torrent of indignation he had aroused. He besought his listeners to calm themselves, for there was an uproar, and begged for silence. When at last he was able to make himself heard, he said:

"But, my brethren, reflect that all this that I tell you happened many years ago. And it may be that it never happened at all."

With these consoling words he was able to calm the perturbed spirits of his congregation.

One of the most interesting things to my mind in the *Spiritual Exercises* is the method of combating sin called Particular and General Examen. The particular examen deals with special sins; the exercitant performs it three times a day; on rising, when he resolves to be on his guard against the sin of which he wishes to amend himself; after dinner, when he marks with dots on a line the number of times he has committed it; and after supper, when he makes dots on a lower line for each subsequent trespass. This he repeats every day, comparing the numbers of dots from day to day. A curious detail is the advice to put his hand to his breast each time he offends, "which may be done even in company without anyone noticing what he is doing." The General Examen, as its name suggests, is a general examination of conscience.

The first week is concerned with sin, the second with contemplation on the life of the Eternal King, the third with contemplation on the Passion of Christ and the fourth on the Resurrection. The second week is the culminating point of the exercises, for it leads to the election of a state of life. The third and fourth week confirm and fortify the exercitant in the resolutions he has then made.

When you look at the exercises as a whole you cannot but observe how marvellously they are devised to effect their object. Saint Ignatius is an artist who forms living souls after his own image. He creates them as the poet creates a poem. But he seeks to strengthen the character rather than to develop the intelligence.

Blind obedience was what he claimed and he allowed to none the pleasant freedom of thinking for himself. We know now how great is the value of suggestion and what strange things may be achieved by its power. Saint Ignatius learnt its secrets in his own person. The physical condition to which the exercitant is reduced and the circumstances in which he performs the exercises produce in him a state of passivity in which he is very ready to receive the desired impressions. One can well imagine that after this shattering experience the spirit must for ever lose its resilience. It is said that the result of the first week is to reduce the neophyte to utter prostration. Contrition saddens, shame and fear harrow him. Not only is he terrified by the frightful pictures on which his mind has dwelt, he has been weakened by lack of food and exhausted by want of sleep. He has been brought to such despair that he does not know where to fly for relief. Then a new ideal is set before him, the ideal of Christ; and to this, his will broken, he is led to sacrifice himself with a joyful heart. It has been said that no heretic who performed the exercises in the indicated way could fail, not only to become a Catholic, but to seek refuge in the Company of Jesus. It is said that the Jesuits who were sent on their dangerous missions to Protestant England, before starting were set a special exercise in which (the composition of place) they were bidden with their mind's eye to picture to themselves the prison into which they might be cast, the grim chamber where horrible torture would be inflicted upon them, and the place of execution where amid frightful torments they would achieve the crown of martyrdom. They were enjoined in imagination to feel the bitter cold of the dungeon and its noisome stench, the heavy chains that galled their flesh, the red-hot irons that seared it, the rack that tore their joints, and the blows that mangled their limbs; and then, in agony, the sharpness of the knife that disembowelled them, the acrid smoke that choked their lungs, and the flames that intolerably burned their living flesh. And such was the anguish of this exercise that when they had at last to submit to the reality they did so, not only without fear, but in complete insensibility. They had already endured all that the mortal body and the immortal soul could endure. And if it is not true and they suffered like other men, they did not survive to say so.

I had the curiosity on one occasion to attempt to do one of the exercises myself. It was a singular experience. I began with the composition of place. It seems simple enough, but I found it none

too easy, and I am not surprised that the commentators have seen the necessity of providing the exercitant with particulars circumstantial enough to eke out a halting fancy. But I found this child's-play compared with the meditation. It is true that I had not prepared myself by fasting or corporal penance, and grace was certainly not vouchsafed me. To me it was incredibly difficult to fix my mind on a subject and concentrate on it without distraction. I was for ever wandering along by-paths and down crooked ways. I could think of anything but what I wanted to. I suppose mathematicians and philosophers can control the flow of their ideas and have no difficulty in directing their reflections towards the end they have in view. With most of us the mind is discursive and the labour of pursuing a train of thought, step by step, without deviation, is very severe. I think a good deal and, I am inclined to believe, with lucidity, but I cannot think to order: notions and impressions come at haphazard, they are stored away in the subconscious and emerge when they are needed, sifted, combined, and elaborated, by no effort that I am aware of: to endeavour then deliberately to picture to myself a series of events and to feel the emotions that moved the actors in them when they experienced them was an exercise of will that I found myself almost incapable of. My spirit (*animula vagula*) seemed to be compassed about by obstacles that were almost material and it fluttered here and there in a desperate anxiety to escape. The violence to which I subjected my imagination paralysed it. I felt like a bird struggling in a net. My head seemed to be constricted in an iron band and I had such a peculiar feeling in the pit of my stomach I thought I was going to be sick.

Saint Ignatius instructed the exercitant to repeat the same meditation twice and sometimes three times; but whether he did this because he knew from his own experience how difficult the performance was or whether he wished only to confirm its effect I do not know. It must then be an exercise of extreme severity. For though we can turn our thoughts again to a subject that has occupied us and, it may be, think of it more profoundly, we cannot by an effort of will feel again an emotion that we have felt before; otherwise, I suppose, none of us would cause others the pain of ceasing to love them. The attempt must tear the nerves to pieces. But I cannot persuade myself that meditation forced upon the mind is likely to give rise to fresh and inspiring notions. I should have thought rather that by such a practice the spirit was enslaved

and cowed, while the happy flow of fancy was for ever stemmed. It may be that this is what Saint Ignatius aimed at. If so the *Spiritual Exercises* are the most wonderful method that has ever been devised to gain control over that vagabond, unstable, and wilful thing, the soul of man.

Considering that their effect has been achieved through a constant and ruthless appeal to terror and shame it is surprising to observe that the last contemplation of all is a contemplation of love.

IV

MANY years ago I wrote a book about Andalusia, but I am bitterly conscious of its defects. It is called *The Land of the Blessed Virgin*. In those days, at the end of the nineteenth century, the young were more immature than at present; they had not the knowing, clever way of concealing their ignorance that now fills with admiration those who have occasion to read their works. I was but twenty-three when I went to Seville. I had spent five years in a London hospital and for the first time in my life was my own master. I have been back to Spain a dozen times since then; it has never ceased to possess for me the glamour of those first few months of heavenly freedom. I had no ties and no responsibilities. I had no care in the world but to write well; I did not know then what severe labour and what harassing bondage this entailed. I wandered about the country, enthusiastic with all the new sights I saw, but my enthusiasm (though I did not know it) was perfectly conventional. It is curious how seldom youth looks at the world with the fresh and direct gaze that you would have expected to come naturally to him; whether from diffidence or timidity, he looks upon what it has never seen before with alien eyes. Perhaps a certain sophistication is needed before one can see things for oneself. Such certainly was the case with me. My feelings were genuine enough, but they were the feelings of the travellers who had gone before me. I saw what Borrow and Richard Ford, Théophile Gautier and Mérimée had seen.

Presently I went for a trip on horseback. At that time the only means of communication between one region and another was the railway, for the roads were impassable to wheeled traffic, and if you wanted to see places that were not on the line you had to ride. When I came back I thought it would be a good exercise to write

an account of the excursion. In fiction the manner of your writing is conditioned by your matter. You cannot write in the same way if you are describing an incident as if you are analysing a state of mind; dialogue, which you aim at making as natural as possible, breaks the pattern; it is only in the essay or in the book of travel that you can attempt a sustained effect. It is very good for the novelist now and again to try his hand at something of the sort.

But when I had done this as best I could I did not know what to do with it. I was never the sort of writer who is content to shut up his work in a drawer. I fell very pleasantly in love while I was in Seville and the possibility had been running in my mind of turning this experience to account by writing a novel in which I might give a romanticised, but ironic, account of it. For even then, not slow to see my own absurdity, I was conscious that I had been made a very pretty fool of. It offered me an opportunity of describing the cathedral, certain pictures, a bull-fight, and the easy, attractive life of Seville. But I hesitated, thinking people would say it was merely an imitation of Pierre Loti (which indeed it would have been), who was then very much read and who had done that sort of thing very delightfully and in graceful French. This was foolish of me. I did not know that in the next thirty years no less than three English writers (and several American) were going to achieve eminence by imitating Anatole France. I might safely have written this book, and had it proved a success I could have followed it up with agreeably humorous and sentimental accounts of an affair of the heart in every country in Europe. I might now enjoy a great reputation as a writer of charm, sensibility, and discrimination. I refrained. But sooner than waste the narrative I had written of my ride I wrote a description of Seville and what I had seen there, added to it, to give it a sort of completeness, sketches of other places in Andalusia, and in this way got together enough material to make a little book.

It was crude and gushing. Thinking it over as the years went by I was persuaded that I could do better and each time I went to Spain I was tempted to try again. But I did not want to write another book of travel. Too many travellers already have travelled in Spain. All the writer can do is to describe his own sensations and there is little likelihood that his descriptions will call up sensations that represent with any exactness the objects he has tried to depict.

The streets of Santiago de Compostela are narrow, paved with great blocks worn smooth by the tread of generations; and they go up and down and wind this way and that. But in the end they all lead to the cathedral, which was the goal for so many centuries of innumerable pilgrims. Now, the façade of this is one of the great sights of the world. It is of grey stone, but here and there yellow with lichen, and in some places are patches of green where a hardy little shrub has managed to attach itself. It is wonderfully impressive against dark and threatening clouds (it rains a great deal in Santiago), but when the sun shines and the sky is blue it has the colour of honey. The architecture is luxuriant, but its heroic grandeur prevents it from being tiresome and the perfect balance of the decorative motives gives an impression of an almost classic severity. It is like a purple patch in Chapman's *Homer*. I cannot but think that the architect must have felt a pang at his heart when he looked at the finished façade and knew that it was magnificent. It is not one of those sights that insinuate their charm and captivate you only after long acquaintance: it takes you by storm. It remains in the mind as a permanent possession and the spirit is enriched by the recollection of it. But words cannot reproduce the splendour of those towers and the satisfactoriness of that opulent symmetry. A glance at a photograph is more likely to give you its peculiar thrill than half a dozen pages of careful description. No, I did not want to write a book of travel.

Several subjects floated about in my mind and I amused myself by considering what I could make of them. For some time I was attracted by Ponce de Leon, the discoverer of Florida; for the *conquistadores* set out on their perilous journeys to the new-discovered lands on the other side of the Atlantic to acquire wealth, but he, more romantically, to find the spring of eternal youth. I invented a story that I liked. Its disadvantage was that it led me overseas, and I wanted to stay in Spain. Then my fancy was taken with the little court that the Dukes of Alba held at Alba de Tormes. They lived magnificently, cultivating the arts; and here, under their protection, the valorous and charming poet Garcilaso de la Vega spent some part of his short and glorious life. I went to Alba. The town runs up the hill by the side of the river. The streets are deserted and chickens run about them; they are paved with rough cobbles so that walking is painful. The houses are small and plain, whitewashed or mud-coloured, and on one or two of the better ones is a coat of arms over the door. But it gives

you an odd thrill to catch sight of the name of the street you are walking through; it is called Calle de los Pages. Nothing remains of the ducal mansion decorated by painters and sculptors from Italy and furnished with the spoils of conquered countries but a sombre tower that stands on the top of a hill. I suppose the gardens, famous in their day, the scene of poetic contests, where the Italianate writers conversed of their art and musicians played the viol and the lute, stretched down to the quiet, winding river; but I could find no trace of them and such of the inhabitants as I asked knew nothing of them. My imagination rebelled against the labour of reconstructing that past life and those dead glories from materials so scanty.

Besides, I wanted a subject that gave me elbow room. I did not want to be confined to the palace of a great nobleman and the doings of cultured persons. I wanted a theme that gave me the opportunity to show the rich and varied life that you read of in the picaresque novels. I wanted to deal with the theatre, for the drama in Spain's golden age, the short period that began with *Lazarillo de Tormes* and ended with Calderon, was not only the national passion but the most characteristic expression of the nation's artistic endeavours. For a little while I played with the notion of writing a novel about Agustin de Rojas, an actor who has left, in *El Viage Entretenido*, not only a graphic account of the stage in his day and the life of a strolling player, but in his devil-may-care account of his own affairs a very sufficient portrait of himself. Even in the Spain of that period it would be difficult to find a man who led a more picturesque life. The son of Diego de Villadiego, a gentleman of birth, and of Luisa de Rojas, whose name, following a Spanish custom not uncommon at the time, he generally used, Agustin was born in Madrid about 1577. At nine years old he was a page in an illustrious house and at fourteen, desiring to see the world and enjoy adventure, he ran away to Seville to become a soldier. He was in garrison for a while at Castilleja de la Cuesta and then set sail for France. He landed in Brittany. For two years he was engaged in various warlike operations, gaining for himself much glory and some profit, and then, sailing for Nantes on a French ship, was taken prisoner. He was brought to La Rochelle and there put to serve a certain Monsieur de Fontena till he was exchanged with his companions in slavery for natives of La Rochelle who were rowing in the Spanish galleys. He spent two years more privateering against English ships and at

last landed in Santander. He made his way to Madrid, where he contracted an illness from which he nearly died.

On his recovery he seems to have gone to sea again in the royal galleys and eventually took his discharge at Malaga. He entered the service of a paymaster and went with him to Granada. He was then twenty-two. In Granada things went well with him and he provided himself with fine clothes and chains of solid gold. But losing his place he returned to Malaga and here had the strangest of his adventures. Having killed a man in a brawl he sought sanctuary in the church of St. John. The police surrounded it and he stayed there for two days. He was starving with hunger. Then, since the watch was somewhat relaxed, risking everything and determined on any extremity, he made a bolt for it. But by good fortune he stumbled upon a very beautiful woman who, carried off her feet by his handsome face and gallant bearing, when she heard of his intention persuaded him to return to the safety of the church. It cost her three hundred ducats to get him out of his scrape, but the payment of such a sum left her destitute. Rojas took her to his lodgings and to provide her with food begged for alms at night, wrote sermons for a friar of the Monastery of St. Augustine (for each of which he was paid with a dish of meat and a pound of bread), stole capes and robbed orchards and vineyards. How the affair ended is uncertain, for at this point of his story the narrator's emotion very unfortunately prevented him from continuing.

But it seems to have been then that he decided to go on the stage. He wandered with one company and another through Spain, accompanied possibly by the beautiful woman who had saved him from the gallows. It happened not infrequently that the theatres were closed, either on account of pestilence or the death of a royal personage, and on one such occasion, being then again in Granada, he opened a haberdashery which was highly successful. He led this life for three years and then a catastrophe befell him. His mistress left him. "At length," he wrote later to some friends in Seville, "I was abandoned by the most lovely angel in the world and the unkindest shepherdess that heaven ever created. Wretched at her cruelty I confess that I was beset by such sore pain that I was on the point of killing myself." He calls the traitress Elisa, but whether it is the heroine of the adventure at Malaga or another there is no knowing. One hopes it was, for it makes a better story. Heartbroken, Rojas repaired to the mountains of Cordova, where he joined himself to the hermits who inhabited their caves, and

with penance and prayer sought to wean himself from the vanity of the world. But he was not of a temper to spend his life in such mortification and after a time he returned to the world that had, all in all, not treated him too badly. He married presently, and since as an actor he could not have saved money and he had some, he must very prudently have chosen a wife with means. But an unfortunate lawsuit deprived him of a considerable part of his fortune, whereupon he entered the service of a Genoese, merchant or banker, who robbed him of the rest. He was for a short time in prison, was attacked and nearly killed by ruffians in Seville, and is last heard of as a scrivener and notary to the Bishop of Zamora. He was then thirty-three.

An adventurous and romantic life. It provided me with pretty well everything I needed; Rojas had charm, humour, and a pretty gift for writing light verse. He was brave. He was of notable beauty. He loved fine clothes and splendid ornaments; and on account of this foible was known to his friends as the Cavalier of the Miracles, since without a penny to bless himself with he never wanted for rich apparel. He had the deep, religious sense that was characteristic of the Spaniard of that day, and when misfortunes fell upon him welcomed them as a bounty granted by the hand of God for the good and glory of his soul.

But I was a little afraid of Agustin de Rojas. He was somewhat too much a man of action for my purpose. When a writer falls into the hands of so vivid a personality as this, he can never be sure that he will not be led along paths he has no wish to tread. A fellow of this sort can very well take things into his own control and give occasion to a book quite different from that which the author had proposed to write. Nor, with my long experience, did I fail to notice that in the love affair which seems to have been the culminating point of Agustin's life it was the woman who was the more interesting party. If it was one and the same woman who ruined herself to save his life, lived with him in penury, and then left him and nearly broke his heart, a singular story emerges. Only a very dull novelist could fail to be taken by this woman of swift passion and reckless temper. Generous and impulsive, she was willing for love's sake to abandon the security which they say women seek above all else and she was indifferent to the extreme of poverty. She was gallant, determined, and adventurous. She found the love that had seemed worth every sacrifice in her heart; and ruthlessly, with the decision that must have charac-

terised her, she left her lover for another. Tender and cruel, faithful and fickle, self-possessed and unrestrained, she must have been an amazing creature.

That was not the subject I wanted. I wanted a freer hand. I thought I should be much better off with a character of my own invention. I did not see why I should not make my hero a young Catholic Scot who had come to seek his fortune under the King of Spain, or the kinsman to an Ambassador accredited to the Court of Madrid by the aged Queen Elizabeth. Such a one I could conduct with verisimilitude through the different worlds that interested me. I wished to concern myself not a little with my hero's spiritual adventures, and it seemed to me that if I made him a reflective, observant youth, well furnished with the culture of the day, I should have a very good opportunity to study the various aspects of the Spanish mind at the moment I proposed to deal with. This was the beginning of the reign of Philip III. Lope de Vega was the idol of the Spanish stage. He ruled his pasteboard kingdom despotically and brooked no rivals. Cervantes had not published *Don Quixote*, but much of the first part was written and he had read some chapters to his friends. El Greco, living in Toledo with no little splendour, had freed himself at last from his long bondage to the Venetians and, in his old age returning to the inspiration of his Cretan youth, was painting the most extraordinary of his pictures. Mateo Aleman had written *Guzman de Alfarache*, the most popular of the picaresque novels, and Vicente Espinel was turning over in his cynical old head the charming *Life of Marcos de Obregon*. You might still meet learned men and great ladies who had talked with the Blessed Teresa de Jesus and there were students in Salamanca who had listened to the lectures of Fray Luis de Leon. The Spaniards were the proudest people in the world. Though ruined and starving they thought themselves still as powerful as when Charles V took the King of France prisoner at Pavia, and though bled white to crush the heretic and keep the faith unsullied they looked upon the sacrifices their foolish Kings demanded of them as no more than their due. *Noblesse oblige*.

I did not dislike my idea. I thought I could make something of it and so set to work. I had read a good deal of Spanish literature in the many years that had passed since first I crossed the Pyrenees, but I had read only for my amusement. Now I started on it again after a more systematic fashion.

IT would be absurd in a little book of this sort, written for my own instruction and amusement, to give a list of the authorities I have consulted; but all the same I should not be easy in my mind unless I acknowledged my debt to the scholarly works of the Professors Altamira and Allison Peers and the advantage I have taken of the industry of Mr. Aubrey Bell, Herr Ludwig Pfandl, and Dr. Rennert. These erudite persons have taught me a great deal and in return I am going to give them a little information that will be new to them. At all events there is no trace in any of their learned books that the matter has ever attracted their attention. I am going to tell them something about food in Spain.

Avila is a city in which it should be pleasant to linger. There is nothing much to do there and little to see. The walls, greatly restored, are like the walls of an old city in a book of hours. The neat, round towers placed at regular intervals look like the trim curls of a seventeenth-century peruke. The cathedral with its fortress-like air has not much to offer you but an effect of sombreness, and its Gothic porches and windows are not so good as many that you have seen elsewhere. Besides, now we are all a little bored with Gothic architecture. But the houses of the old *hidalgos* have still kept something of their grave stateliness; those grand escutcheons over the doorways are impressive. A silent city. There are many streets in which you may stand for an hour without seeing a passer-by. The men in Avila are soberly dressed and the women wear deep mourning. The air even in summer has a certain sharpness; in spring and autumn the wind blows bitter, and in winter the cold is severe. It is Castile with its reserve, its taciturnity, and its ceremonial stiffness. But the hotel is one of the worst in Spain. The rooms are bare and comfortless, it is none too clean, and it smells; the food, served in a grim, large dining-room in which there is a harsh blaze of electric light, is frightful; one uneatable dish follows another, thrown at you by a slovenly waiter with dirty hands, on cold plates, and the cellar can provide hardly any of the wines the list offers.

I can eat almost anything, if not with pleasure, without distaste, and a bad dinner does nothing to disturb my serenity. I can say with truth that I have a soul above food, but alas, though my spirit is strong my flesh is weak, and a poor meal, which I have

devoured without complaint, will make me as sick as a dog for a week. That body which Fray Roldan spoke of as the *asinillo*, the little donkey, will let my dancing spirit take no liberties with it. On one such occasion in Avila, having at last fallen asleep after tossing from side to side on my hard bed for hours, I was awakened by the crowing of a cock, and a few minutes later I heard the sudden hubbub of a bell. It was quite startling in that deep night. It occurred to me that they must be ringing for early Mass. I got up, slipped a pair of trousers over my pyjamas, and put on a great-coat; the night porter opened the door for me and I walked across the street. The cathedral was in darkness but for one chapel in which burned an electric light. A sacristan, muffled up in a cloak, with a grey woollen scarf over his mouth and nose, was lighting candles. I saw the backs of three women in black kneeling before the altar. A peasant woman, with a basket on her arm and a handkerchief over her head, came along just before the priest. He seemed to be in a hurry, a fat little man with grey hair and an earthy face; he walked so quickly that the acolyte behind him was almost running. As he uttered the first words of the Mass, gabbling unintelligibly in a low voice, a man stepped out of the darkness. I glanced at him with surprise. I had not thought that anyone was there but those four women. He was a tall, thin man, with a voluminous cloak draped round him; he had flashing eyes under bushy eyebrows, a big hooked nose, and an immense head of long, curling, grey hair; his face was harsh and rugged. So might have looked one of the old *conquistadores*. He did not kneel. He stood motionless, his mouth tight-closed, with his strange eyes fixed on the altar. I wondered what he did there. It was bitterly cold. I felt very sick. I went back to the hotel and they gave me goat's milk with my coffee and rancid butter with my bread. It was too much.

You must not be blamed, then, if in Avila you say that it is impossible to get a decent meal in Spain. But it is an error. You can eat very well in Spain, only you must know where to go and how to set about it. In the first place you must decide to make your meal of a single dish and it may be that this is a very wise thing. For thus you do not overeat. However good one dish is, you can only eat as much as will satisfy your hunger.

The Spaniards are coarse but sparing eaters. They do not seem to mind if their food is bad and ill-cooked, they will eat fish that is far from fresh, and *bollito* and *garbanzos*, boiled beef and chick-

peas, monotonous fare, day after day without disgust. They have always been frugal. Indeed one of the great virtues of the Spanish soldier was that he could march and fight on so little food that you would have thought it hardly enough to keep body and soul together. The traveller, you read in the picaresque novels, was content to make a meal off a hunk of bread and an onion. On the other hand it must be admitted that when it came to a feast their capacity was enormous. When Sempronio and Parmeno wanted to offer their two girl friends and the old bawd Celestina a supper they sent along (for five persons) a ham, six pairs of young chickens and some pigeons, Murviedo wine, and white bread. When I first went to Spain it was difficult, except in one or two hotels in Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville where they made a poor imitation of French rolls, to get any bread except a sort of double roll of a doughy white substance unappetising to look at, tasteless to eat, and heavy on the stomach. Now you can get French bread in any town of consequence, but it is neither crisp nor savoury. If you want good bread you must go to some of the mountain villages in the north, where, if you are lucky enough to get there just when it comes from the baker's, you may eat a loaf of rye bread, beautiful in colour and sweet-smelling, with a crust that crumbles in the mouth deliciously. With this and some butter—almost unobtainable in Spain thirty years ago, but now to be found everywhere—a few olives, anchovies, and a goat cheese you can make a repast fit for a king.

Of course no one who has any sense will eat the *table d'hôte* meals provided in hotels. They are long and bad after the French style in the first-class hotels; they are long and no worse after the Spanish style in the second-class. Their monotony is deplorable. In both you will get the same insipid clear soup; and you will seldom see any fish but the coarse, tough, savourless *merluza*. Hake! You can bake it, boil it, stew it, fry it, grill it; you can tickle it up with Worcester sauce, you can drench it in tomato ketchup, you can souce it in oil and vinegar, you can dabble it in mayonnaise, *Bearnaise*, *Hollandaise*, *sauce tartare*; it remains savourless, coarse, and tough.

But even in the hotels, in those not quite of the first class, that is, if they are not very busy and you will talk it over in a friendly way with the head-waiter or the cook, you can often get very good things to eat. Thus at Alicante, one of those agreeable towns in which there is nothing whatever to see, to which I went in the dead

season, I got an *arroz à la Valenciana* which was perfect. I drank the local wine with it, a pale wine, very palatable, with a faint flavour of muscatel. I forgot to say that you will never like Spanish fare unless you can stomach food cooked in oil; if you insist that everything you eat should be cooked in butter, then you must expect nothing from Spain but the gratifications of the spirit; the table can have no pleasures to offer you.

Arroz à la Valenciana is the local dish of Valencia and I dare say it was invented in that dull and noisy city. When Ruy Dias de Bivar conquered Valencia he proceeded according to the poem as follows:

*"With my Cid to the Alcazar went straight his wife and daughters.
Once there he led them to the highest point of all,
Where did fair eyes look on all sides around.
At their feet they behold the city Valencia where it lies,
And yonder on the other side within their view is the sea."*

I like to think that then he took them by the hand and led them to where was waiting for them a goodly dish of *arroz à la Valenciana*. I wish that Professor Peers, who spent some months there, I believe, had for a little while diverted his erudite studies on El Cid Campeador (an engaging ruffian) to look into the origins of this tasty dish. I should like to know whether it was the discovery of a Moor of genius, or whether it invented itself by accident, simultaneously, in the kitchens of a hundred Moorish housewives. Though it is called after Valencia it is eaten all along the coast from Barcelona to Malaga. In Andalusia it is called *paella*. It is never bad and sometimes of an excellence that surpasses belief. Rice is of course its foundation, saffron and red peppers give it a Spanish tang; it has chicken in it, clams, mussels, prawns, and I know not what. It takes a long time to make and is a great deal of trouble. It is worth the time and worth the trouble. But the best *arroz* I ever ate was at Tarragona.

Tarragona has a cathedral that is grey and austere, very plain, with immense, severe pillars; it is like a fortress; a place of worship for headstrong, violent, and cruel men. The night falls early within its walls and then the columns in the aisles seem to squat down on themselves and darkness shrouds the Gothic arches. It terrifies you. It is like a dungeon. I was there last on a Monday in Holy Week and from the pulpit a preacher was delivering a Lenten

sermon. Two or three naked electric globes threw a cold light that cut the outline of the columns against the darkness as though with scissors. It only just fell upon the crowd, mostly women, who sat, between the chancel and the choir, huddled together as though they cowered in fear of a foe that besieged the city. With violent gestures, in a loud, scolding voice, the preacher poured forth with extreme rapidity a torrent of denunciation. Each angry, florid phrase was like a blow and one blow followed another with vicious insistence. From the farthest end of the majestic church, winding about the columns and curling round the groining of the arches, down the great austere nave and along the dungeon-like aisles, that rasping, shrewish voice pursued you.

But a devout admirer had entertained the preacher at luncheon that day in the hotel in which I was staying. It was quite a party. There were the host's grey-haired and corpulent wife, his two sons with their wives, or his two daughters with their husbands (I could only guess), and eight or nine children of various ages, whom I tried to sort out. The preacher tucked in to the *arroz* like one o'clock. It comforted me at that moment to remember this. It was a bad, bad world, but a merciful providence had allowed occasional alleviations to the miserable lot of man, and among these must undoubtedly be placed *arroz à la Valenciana* as we had both eaten it that noon at Tarragona.

In almost every town in Spain you can find a restaurant in which you can eat well enough to satisfy an exigent taste. In Madrid you can find half a dozen. But there is one that should be known to all travellers. It is in the Plaza de los Herradores. It is bare and comfortable; you sit on a hard chair; the linen is coarse and the light is harsh. But you do not care, for your mouth waters with pleasant anticipation: you are going to eat sucking-pig. Four or five of them lie on a dish in the window, with cut throats, and they look so like new-born babies that it gives you quite a turn. But you must avert your mind resolutely from this notion. They are killed at three weeks old. It is impossible to describe how good they are, how tender, how succulent, how juicy, and what spiritual ecstasy there is in the crackling: just as there is nothing really to say about a symphony, you must listen to it; so there is nothing to be said about a sucking-pig, you must eat it.

For a reason that I have never been able to discover you eat much better in the north of a country than in the south. The English cherish the ingenuous notion that you can eat well any-

where in France. It is not true. They think that you can go to no restaurant in France, to no hotel, in which you cannot get a good omelette. It is not true. You cannot eat well south of Vienne. And in Andalusia you eat romantically rather than to the satisfaction of your palate. My thoughts wander back to a tavern in Seville, just off the Sierpes, where the *manzanilla* was good and the innkeeper got his hams from Estramadura. You used to go there late at night, after the *zarzuela* at the theatre was over, and order yourself half a portion of smoked ham and a dish of black, juicy olives. A boy would cut across the street and bring you from the cook-shop a plate of fried fish. You sat in a little cubicle, on a wooden bench, with a companion (for who can eat alone?), and in the next cubicle, if you were in luck, there would be a little party, one of the men with a guitar, and after a long introductory twanging a woman broke into the melancholy, Moorish wail of a *seguidilla*.

The Spanish are fond of sea-food. The itinerant salesmen with their baskets of shrimps, huge prawns, clams, and sea-urchins do a great trade as they wander from tavern to tavern. The fish in the fried fish shops is very fresh and, provided of course that you do not mind its being cooked in oil, exceedingly good. But if you want to eat fish you must really go to Vigo. When, notwithstanding all I have written, I am inclined with melancholy to agree with those who say that you cannot eat well in Spain, I think of Vigo and tell myself that this is nonsense. Vigo is one of the few ports in Europe where you can get fish. Boulogne is another. There are none in England. I have never eaten a better luncheon in my life than I ate at Vigo. There was every variety of fish as *hors d'œuvre*, clams, prawns, mussels, anchovies, and a dozen more; a shrimp omelette, and then a delicious fried fish that you knew had come out of the sea that very morning; kid, very tender and good, and two or three dishes to follow. But these, my hunger satisfied, I left untouched. It was a wonderful meal.

But Vigo, alas, does not hold for me only this charming memory; it holds for me also the memory of an opportunity missed, and I cannot think of it without some pricking of conscience. It was like this. I stopped at Vigo on my way from Santiago to Salamanca. I had discovered from the map that it was not easy to find one's way out of the town, and when after luncheon I was asking the porter of the hotel to direct me, a small boy came up and offered to show me. To my surprise, for Vigo

is on the western coast of Spain, a little north of Portugal, he spoke in French, and not only in French but in the unmistakable accent of the Midi. I asked him what this meant. He told me he was born in Marseilles. I bade him jump in the car and we drove off.

He said he was fourteen, but he was undersized and looked less. He was very thin, almost in rags, with a pinched, sallow face all eyes. In the intervals of directing us through narrow streets and round unexpected turnings he told me that he was a foundling who had been taken care of in the hospital in Marseilles for lost children. A few months before, because he was unhappy, he had run down to the harbour and stowed away in a sailing ship which he learnt was about to sail. He did not know whither she was bound. They did not find him till they were well out at sea, and when they did they beat him and put him to work in the cook's galley. It was a French boat and he was afraid they would take him back to France and return him to the hospital; so when they touched at Vigo he ran away again and hid himself till she sailed. He had nothing but the clothes he stood up in, not a penny in his pocket, and no papers of any sort to identify him. His only name was the name they had given him at the hospital. I do not suppose anyone could be more alone in the world.

"How do you live?" I asked him.

"Oh, I manage. I run errands. Sometimes someone gives me a few coppers."

"Don't you starve often?"

"Oh, I don't say I'm not hungry sometimes. I don't care. I'd sooner die than go back to the hospital."

"And where do you sleep?"

"In the street. It's all right in summer. It's cold in winter, but I manage. I know a shed that's not locked and I can get in there whenever I want to. You see, I like my liberty."

He had the meridional gift of the gab and he expressed himself with a fine flow of language, with eloquent shrugs of his little thin shoulders and with jaunty waves of the hand. He made light of everything. He was not only cheerful, he was gay. Then we reached the end of the town and the high road stretched before us. There was no longer any possibility of losing the way. I stopped the car and the boy jumped out.

"*Bon voyage*," he said, with a smile, as we started off again.

I had rewarded him adequately, even generously I hope, for the

service he had done me, but that is all I can say. The encounter was so unexpected, the boy's story so strange, that I had not time to bethink myself. When it was too late I wished that instead of a few pesetas I had given him enough to keep him for a month or two at least. I wished I had offered to take him on to Salamanca. I do not know what he would have done there, but he might have liked the adventure, and at all events I could have given him board and lodging for a while. For there, in flesh and blood, to-day was the picaroon of history. It was when he was fourteen that Agustin de Rojas ran away to Seville to be a soldier; it was when he was fourteen that Lazarillo de Tormes left his father's house to make his astonishing way in the world. Since then I have often, not without uneasiness, wondered what has happened to this little boy. I wonder if he has starved to death. I wonder if he has gone to gaol. (That would not matter so much, it would be part of the luck of the game.) I wonder if the authorities got hold of him and sent him back to his own country. He was quick-witted, courageous, and hardy. I have a feeling that he would find himself in no predicament that he could not wriggle out of. I have a hope that like those ancestors of his that he does not know, the careless picaroons of the Golden Age, he will go from master to master, now with good hap, now with bad, from one improbable adventure to another, light-fingered of course, keeping his head, with his bright alert eyes always on the watch to seize the passing chance and so make himself in the end master of the world whose only sense, so far as he can tell, is that it is there for him to exploit.

VI

I THINK it was George Borrow who said that the Spanish language was greater than its literature. The statement is true. The language is an instrument of strength and delicacy. It has a grandeur that gives ample opportunity for oratorical effect (an opportunity the Spanish authors did not neglect) and a concreteness that enables it to be written with a felicitous simplicity. It has a succinctness that Latin hardly surpasses.

There was a young man who went to Granada. It was his first visit. On the night of his arrival, after dinner, too excited to stay in, he went down to the town. Here, because he was twenty-four and also perhaps a little because he thought the gesture suited to

the occasion, he had himself directed to a brothel. He picked out a girl of whom he could remember nothing afterwards but that she had large green eyes in a pallid face. He was struck by their colour, for it was that which the old Spanish poets and story-tellers were always giving to their heroines, and since it is a colour very seldom seen in Spain the commentators have opined that when the writers talked of green they meant something else. But here it was. When the girl stripped, the young man was taken aback to see that she was still a child.

"You look very young to be in a place like this," he said. "How old are you?"

"Thirt-en."

"What made you come here?"

"*Hambre*," she answered. "*Hunger*."

The young man suffered from a sensibility that was doubtless excessive. The tragic word stabbed him. Giving her money (he was poor and could not afford much) he told the girl to dress up again, and, all passion spent, slowly climbed up the hill and went to bed.

There is a passage in the autobiography (more or less true) of Alonso de Contreras, who began life as a scullion and ended it as a Knight of Malta, that has always seemed to me a masterpiece of narrative and an example of perfect style. Having at one period of his picturesque career married the well-to-do widow of a judge, his suspicions were aroused that she was deceiving him with his most intimate friend. One morning he discovered them in one another's arms. "*Murieron*," he writes. "They died." With that one grim word he dismisses the matter and passes on to other things. That is proper writing.

There are innumerable idioms in Spanish; they give the language pungency. It makes an ampler and more complicated use of the subjunctive than most modern languages and so gets into its speech a peculiar elegance. We have pretty well lost the use of this mood in English and when we resort to it it falls upon the ear affectedly; but it cannot, I think, be denied that it adds grace and distinction to a language. It is startling, and to anyone sensitive to such things charming, to hear a peasant in the course of conversation use with the accuracy of second nature the various forms of the subjunctive that the grammars give. Spanish has a harsher sound than Italian; it has not the euphonious monotony that makes that language somewhat fatiguing to listen to; it has a leap-

ing, quick vivacity that forces the attention. It has nobility and deliberation. Every letter counts; every syllable has value. I like the story they tell of Charles V: he said that German was the best language in which to address horses, French to converse with statesmen, Italian to talk to women, English to call to birds; but that Spanish was the only language in which to address kings, princes, and God.

It is with a certain dismay, then, that the student of Spanish literature grows little by little conscious of the fact that Spain has produced few words that are worthy of the instrument the writers had at their disposal. There is an engaging little story in the Spanish grammar. One day Louis XIV asked one of his courtiers: "Do you know Spanish?"

"No, sire," answered the other. "But I will learn it."

He set to work, for he thought it was the King's intention to appoint him Ambassador to the Court of Spain, and after a time said to the King:

"Sire, now I know Spanish."

"Very good," the King replied. "Then you will be able to read *Don Quixote* in the original."

That is a grand thing to be able to do. It is an unforgettable experience; but it must be allowed that there is nothing else the foreigner can read (except perhaps a few poems by the enchanting Saint John of the Cross) that will leave him spiritually very much the richer. The fact is that the Spanish are not pre-eminently an intellectual people. They have added surprisingly little to the great stock of thought that forms the working material of our world. They have produced neither a philosopher nor a man of science of the first rank. Their best poetry, putting aside the ballads, was derived from Italy. Their mystics learnt their lore from the great mystics of Germany and the Low Countries. The most intelligent of them was St. John of the Cross. He was a rare poet, as lovely as Vaughan and as poignant as George Herbert. His prose reveals a character of appealing sweetness, a clear and discriminating brain, but a genius that was neither very profound nor very original.

I have a notion that the writers of Spain were hampered not so much by a natural want of talent as by the circumstances of the time. It was impossible for an author in the Golden Age to earn a living wage, and though in those days to patronise the artist added to the renown of the great, they were often more niggardly

than the objects of their patronage expected. The great works of its literature were produced not by professionals, but by amateurs. The Spanish writers were soldiers broken in the wars, diplomatists in retirement, clerics who wanted to beguile their leisure, doctors, and civil servants. They wrote as a pastime or because they wanted money. Cervantes, as we know, wrote only when he was out of a job, and it is likely enough that if he had got one of the posts in America he applied for we should never have had *Don Quixote*. It was only when all else had failed that he set himself to earn his living by his pen. The only important writer I can think of who made writing his profession is Lope de Vega, and even he, with all his prodigious industry, was on occasion obliged to enter the service of some nobleman.

On the whole the defects you find in the Spanish writers are those you expect amateurs to have. They produced a literature not of sustained force, but of brilliant beginnings. To produce a body of work, each one of which is complete, with its various parts in due relation to the whole, needs the application of a lifetime. It can only be produced by one who makes writing the main business of his life. Perfection, we know, is not to be reached, but I think it has never been more completely missed than in Spain by writers of such gifts. Of course Spanish literature has many virtues. It has spontaneity. It has strangeness. It has a savour of the soil. It represents very well those brutal, courageous, passionate, idealistic, earthy, humorous, cruel, and humane men who subjected a continent and discovered a world.

One would have thought that it would be the most delightful thing possible to read the picaresque novels; on the contrary it is in the main a dreary business.

It is far from my purpose to instruct the reader, but I may state in passing that the picaresque novel is one in which the characters are taken from the dregs of society and in which the hero lives on his wits. It is generally written in the first person. The hero in the classic type of the kind is a serving-man who goes from master to master. This is obviously a very convenient way of taking him through a variety of adventures and showing a diversity of conditions. It is the most characteristic form of Spanish literature. Its widespread influence was peculiarly felt in England and but for its vogue the novels of Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, and Charles Dickens would most likely be different from what they are. It is often said to have been invented in Spain and certainly no

picaresque novels were more popular in Europe than the Spanish, but Spaniards have never so far as I know invented anything, and the *Satyricon* of Petronius is there to prove that the form had a long life before ever a picaresque novel was written in Spain. The picaresque novel is the counterpart of the romances of chivalry, which as we know were for long inordinately enjoyed in Spain, and responds to that other side of the Spanish character, the mocking, realistic one, which so strangely exists cheek by jowl with the idealistic and mystical.

The first of these novels is also the shortest. It is called *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and its success established the form in the public favour. The historians of literature say that it was occasioned by the change in social conditions, the ruin of commerce, industry and agriculture, and the centralisation of power in the capital, which attracted to it adventurers of all kinds. But novels are not written for reasons of this sort now, at least not readable ones, and I very much doubt if they were in the sixteenth century. It never occurs to the critics that writers often write for fun. I should have thought the author, whether the monk Juan de Ortega or the retired diplomatist Diego de Mendoza, knowing his classics and being well acquainted with the *Celestina* of the Archpriest of Hita, thought it would be amusing to write the autobiography of a young scamp and, having got hold of a good idea, did what authors do in such a case, wrote it. He was a humorist and it gave him the opportunity to say many sharp things about monks and priests. The little book is no longer than Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. It tells the birth and childhood of the picaroon and his sojourns with various masters, a blind beggar, a priest, a squire, a mendicant friar, a seller of indulgences, a chaplain, and a policeman. It leaves him as town-crier and the complaisant husband of an archdeacon's mistress. The incidents follow so fast on one another that the reader is constantly entertained. In the squire whom Lazarillo served in Toledo the author was lucky enough to describe for the first time a type, the proud, hungry, dignified, and melancholy gentleman, that, from its humour and pathos, went to the heart of his countrymen. It would be difficult to count the number of times this character has since then reappeared within the covers of a novel or on the stage of a theatre.

Lazarillo, wandering famished through the streets of Toledo, came upon a gentleman in sumptuous apparel who walked with measured steps. The gentleman looked at him.

"Boy, dost thou want a master?"

"I would fain have a good master, sir."

"Then follow me. God hath sent thee good fortune to meet with me, thou hast prayed well this day."

The gentleman took him to a house, but the walls were bare, and there was not so much as a chair or a stool, nor a table, nor yet a coffer, so that you would have said it was uninhabited. And presently the gentleman asked him whether he had dined.

"No, sir, for it was not eight o'clock when I met with your mastership this morning."

"Then," said he, "as early as it was, I had broken my fast, and whensoever I break my fast in the morning, I never eat again till it is night, therefore pass thou over the time as well as thou canst and we will make amends at supper."

Taken aback, Lazarillo hid himself behind the door, where he drew some pieces of bread out of his bosom that he had been given in charity two days before. But the gentleman saw him.

"Come hither, boy," he said. "What dost thou eat?"

He showed him the bread, and the gentleman took a piece.

"By my soul, methinks this bread is good and savourous," he said.

No supper was forthcoming, and next day, driven by hunger, Lazarillo went a-begging from door to door. When he came home again with his spoils, not only bread but tripe and a neat's foot, he found his master awaiting him.

"I have tarried for thee to dinner," he said, mildly, "and because I could not see thee come I dined alone."

The boy began to eat his victuals and his master eyed him hungrily. Whereupon the boy said:

"Sir, the good tools make the workman good, this bread hath good taste, and this neat's foot is so well sodden, and so cleanly dressed, that it is able with the savour of it only to entice any man to eat of it."

"What is it, a neat's foot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now I promise thee it is the best morsel in the world, there is no pheasant that I would like so well."

"I pray you, sir, prove of it better and see how you like it."

The boy gave him the neat's foot, with two or three pieces of the whitest bread he had, whereupon the gentleman sat down beside him and began to eat like one that had great need, gnawing

every one of those little bones better than any greyhound could have done for life.

He had land that, if it were in a better situation and had a great house on it, would be worth much money; and he had a dovecot that, had it not been in ruins, would yield him more than two hundred pigeons a year. These he had forsaken for matters that touched his honour. Had he not almost beaten a craftsman who on meeting him had greeted him with the words: "Sir, God maintain your worship"? The proper way for a man of that condition to greet a knight or a gentleman was to say: "I kiss your worship's hand"; and he would not suffer any man, unless it were the King, to say to him: "Sir, God maintain you." He was come to Toledo to serve some great nobleman. He was starving. But he remained dignified, kindly, and courteous. He was bound to none but to God and to the Prince. He maintained his honour unsullied and that was the only refuge of an honest man.

In the morning when he rose he made clean his hose, his doublet, and his cloak; Lazarillo gave him water for his hands; he combed his hair and taking his sword kissed the pommel.

"My boy," he said, "if thou knewest what a blade this is thou wouldst marvel; there is no gold that can buy it of me, for of as many as Antonio made he could never give such temper to any as he gave this."

He drew it from the scabbard and tested the edge with his fingers.

"Seest thou it? I dare undertake to cut asunder with it a whole fleece of wool."

Then, putting up his sword, he hung it at his girdle and with leisurely gait strode out of the house. He held himself erect, casting the end of his cloak sometimes upon his shoulder and other-whiles under his arm, with his right hand always on his side. He went up the street with such comely gesture and countenance that you would have judged him to be near kinsman to the High Constable of Spain. Who would have thought that such a noble gentleman had eaten nothing all yesterday but one piece of bread that his servant Lazarillo had kept in the chest of his bosom a day and a night? He went to a garden of the town over the water and dallied with personable women, devising and counterfeiting all kind of bravery, reciting more pleasant and sweet words than ever Ovid wrote. And when Lazarillo could beg nothing and his master had not a morsel to eat, still he would brave it out, walking his accustomed stately pace, and when he came home stand at the

door of his house and for his honour's sake pick his teeth with a straw to show to all men that he had richly dined.

Though hunger might gnaw his vitals despair could not subdue his courage. A gentleman and a man of honour, he faced adversity without dismay. The Spanish, with a tear and a smile, have recognised in him a true Castilian. It was to such as he that they owed their greatness and their ruin. Even the scamp who served him loved him well. He pitied him for all that he saw him suffer and notwithstanding his fantastical pride was glad to have him for his master.

Tenderness like this is unique in the picaresque novels. They offer you but a monotonous recital of mean shifts, petty thieving, and brutal jests. The most popular of them all was *Guzman de Alfarache*. Most of the critics describe it as a work of infinite tediousness; but I knew that my favourite Hazlitt greatly admired it; he praised it for the fine mixture of drollery and grave moralising. The witty and brilliant Jesuit Baltazar Gracian is said to have kept it constantly by his side both for its entertainment and its excellent style. I read it then with curiosity. Of the style a foreigner can only speak with diffidence, but even a foreigner can see that it is simple, unaffected, and vivid. It has a coolness and discretion that you do not find in English till Dryden nearly a century later learnt it from the French. If good writing should be like the conversation of a well-bred man, then it is obviously very good writing indeed. But no academic critic could exaggerate the tediousness of the matter. I do not think it is in human nature to read the whole work through. The hero is by turns a scullion, a porter, a gallant, a soldier, a beggar, page to a cardinal and pimp to an ambassador, a merchant, a student, and finally a galley slave. Each of his adventures is followed by a long moral disquisition and strangely enough it is to these intolerable homilies that was due the book's enormous vogue with the readers of its own day. It is interspersed with short stories, of which one, that of Dorido and Clorinia, has a grim brutality that is rather engaging. Of course it is possible to skip the stories and the moralising and read only the adventures. They are very boring. It is all pilfering, card-sharping, beastly practical jokes, and vulgar cunning. They show a lamentable poverty of invention. Nor do any of the many characters that are introduced live. This fault *Guzman de Alfarache* shares with the rest of the picaresque novels. Guzman is little more than a common sneak-thief. In the whole course of his

career of roguery there is but one enterprise that can afford satisfaction to the disinterested admirer of crime. He was the bastard son of a bankrupt Genoese settled in Seville and on his first arrival at Genoa, a ragged boy, he claimed relationship with his father's brother. With the ingenuous notion, common to crooks of all ages, that though he used his fellows ill, his fellows were bound to use him well, he was much affronted when his uncle would not acknowledge him. Eight years elapsed and he made up his mind to get even with him. Having got possession of a considerable sum of money in Milan he set out for Genoa. There he passed himself off as Don Juan de Guzman, a Se villan of means and birth. His father's family not recognising in this fine gentleman the rapscallion whom they had once driven out of the city, were glad to accept him for the wealth they presumed him to have and the grand connections of which he boasted. He spent his time in feasting and in the society of comely women. He was open-handed. In order to keep the rich young man among them his relations went so far as to offer him in marriage a damsel of no fortune but great quality. He played cards with the visitors to the lodgings he had taken at an inn, allowing them to win when he pleased, but keeping the balance well in his favour; for the accomplishment on which he most prided himself was his skill in so manipulating the cards that he could afford to be indifferent to the luck of the game. He had made friends with the captain of a galley and by spinning him an elaborate yarn about an affront that he had to avenge, which would entail his secret departure from Genoa, arranged with him for a passage to Spain. When the sailing date was settled he got to work. He transferred his own effects secretly to the galley and bought trunks which he filled with stones. Two of them he deposited with his uncle for safety, under the pretence that they contained plate of great value and jewels. Two others, to give his landlord confidence, he left at the inn. He had a couple of chains, one of gold and the other of copper, but identical in appearance, and by a neat trick he managed to get a cousin to lend him six hundred ducats on the false one under the impression that he held the real one as security. He announced his immediate marriage to the poor but noble young woman who had been proposed to him, whereupon his acquaintance showered presents on him so rich that he confesses he was almost ashamed to take them. These also he conveyed to the galley. He arranged a final game of cards, at the end of which all his friends' money

was in his own pocket, went on board, and in the morning found himself well out at sea with his booty.

Since the people he robbed are shown as despicable as the trickster, the reader is left with the satisfaction, which no pity disturbs, of a confidence trick carried out with complete success.

It is a relief to turn from this dull book to the *Life of Marcos de Obregon* by Vicente Espinel. It was something new in the picaresque novel, for it was a romanticised autobiography. Espinel's life was in itself a picaresque novel and to write his book he had to do little more than narrate his own experiences. He was born in the wind-swept city of Ronda. His grandfather, a native of Santillana (the birthplace of Gil Blas), had taken part in the conquest of Granada and the Catholic Kings had made him a grant of land. Espinel learnt Latin grammar and the elements of music and at the age of twenty set out to pursue his studies at the University of Salamanca. After a residence of two years this was closed on account of the troubles occasioned by the trial of Luis de Leon, and he returned, for want of money travelling on foot, to his native town. Here relatives founded a chaplaincy of which they made him chaplain. It provided him with funds to return to Salamanca. He was a poet and a musician, and this enabled him to enter the society of the men of letters and the men of birth who resided in the city. But the desire of fame made him once more abandon his studies. He enlisted in the fleet that was at that time being collected at Santander. Plague, however, broke out and the fleet was unable to sail. Espinel found his way to Valladolid, where he entered the service of the Count de Lemos. He grew tired of this peaceful life after four years and set off for Seville to join the expedition to Africa that resulted in the defeat and death of the romantic King Sebastian of Portugal. Fortunately he arrived too late.

For a year he earned his living in Seville by writing obscene verse and playing his guitar in taverns and brothels. Then he sailed for Italy. Landing on the island of Cabrera to get water for the ship he and his companions were captured by pirates, taken to Algiers, and there sold in slavery to a renegade. He was put to row in a galley, and after various adventures the galley was captured by the Genoese; he was released and landed at Genoa. From here, provided with money and a horse, he made his way to Flanders, where he joined the army of Alexander Farnese and took part in the siege of Maestricht. He made friends with Don

Hernando de Toledo and returned with him to Italy. Under his protection he resided there for three years, writing poetry and studying music; he visited the cities of that beautiful country and then, his health no longer what it was, his youth past, he began to think that a more peaceful life would befit him; he returned to Spain, was ordained a priest and settled down in Ronda to pass his declining years in respectable tranquillity. He published his poems and produced a translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*. But Vicente Espinel was a man whose passions were music and the delightful art of conversation. In Ronda there was no one he could talk to. Its inhabitants were concerned with nothing but the weather and the crops. His verse grew melancholy. He complained that people spoke ill of him. Presently he betook himself to Madrid. Here through influence he obtained the profitable chaplaincy of the Royal Hospital at Ronda, but he had little intention of abandoning the capital and so named a substitute to perform the duties of his office. The authorities of Ronda complained and notwithstanding his protests a royal order forced him to fulfil his charge in person. He spent three unhappy years in Ronda. His fellow-citizens reproached him, certainly with justice, for his bad behaviour and licentious life; and at last, appointing another substitute, he returned to Madrid. He graduated as master of arts at Alcalá and the Bishop of Plasencia made him his chaplain and master of his music. The salary was generous and he settled down for good in the capital.

He was famous. He added the fifth string to the guitar and his contemporaries ascribed to him the invention of a stanza which was called after him. He was the friend of Cervantes and of Lope de Vega. He was a figure at literary gatherings. Authors submitted their works for his approval. In this pleasing manner he passed the last twenty-five years of his life. In his foolish youth, he wrote, he had had few virtues and many vices; he had not always observed the laws of temperance; he had enjoyed the pleasures of the table and had looked deep into the wine cup; he had made many a joyful sacrifice on the altar of the Cypriote. In plain words he had liked good food and good wine and wenched whenever he got the chance. Remembering past delights and hoping, he says, that his experiences would serve as a lesson to others, he wrote the novel which is called *Vida de Marcos de Obregon*. It was first published in 1618, when its author had reached the respectable age of sixty-six.

His aim was didactic, but his moral reflections are on the whole brief, and he reproved sin with the indulgence of one who knew the world. He ascribed the vices of men to error of judgment. Marcos de Obregon is not a knave who narrates his rogueries with complacency, but an observer who takes life as it comes. He does not move only in the dregs of society, but consorts also with gentlemen, men of letters, and musicians. You cannot resist the conclusion that Vicente Espinel was a charming, amiable, courageous, and sensible man. He had wit and he enjoyed life.

There is one episode in this book that is really moving. When Espinel (for it is of himself he writes though he purports to write of Marcos de Obregon) was captured by the Genoese in the Algerian galley they took him for a renegade, handcuffed him, beat him with cudgels, and told him that on arriving in Genoa he would be hanged. When they beat him, he cried: "They say there's no wood in Genoa; there's quite enough for me." Two musicians who were standing by heard his retort and laughed. He knew one of them very well, but was ashamed to discover himself. The admiral, however, gave orders that until they knew who he was, for he denied that he was the renegade they took him for, he should not be ill-treated. They took off his handcuffs. There was something of a storm in the Gulf of Lyons and when it was past the admiral, Marcello Doria, ordered his musicians to sing to him. The first thing they sang was a song that Espinel himself had written and composed: the refrain was:

"El bien dudoso, el mal seguro y cierto."

("The good is doubtful: the bad sure and certain.")

They sang the verses one after the other, and when they came to the refrain for the last time he could not contain himself.

"And yet this pain of mine continues," he cried.

The singer, hearing what he said, looked at him. But he was short-sighted and Espinel in rags. His hardships, his privations, had so changed him that he was scarcely recognisable. Francisco de la Peña, for that was the singer's name, stared at him, and then, suddenly, unable to speak, his eyes wet with tears, took him in his arms. He addressed the admiral.

"Whom does Your Excellency think that we have with us?" he said.

"Whom?"

"The author of these verses and this melody and of much else that we have sung to Your Excellency."

"What do you say? Call him."

The admiral was shocked to see a man of whom he had heard so much in such a plight. He forthwith gave him decent clothes and showed him favour.

It is a pleasant example of that *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* which Aristotle considered the most affecting things in tragedy.

There is one thing that strikes the diligent reader of the picaresque novels and that is the strange way in which the authors neglected the opportunities the times afforded them. For it was a period of great events. Cervantes was wounded at the battle of Lepanto, the greatest victory of the second Philip's reign. The Netherlands revolted and the Duke of Alba was sent to quell the rebels. Portugal was joined to the Spanish Empire. In America new realms were added to it. Drake singed the King of Spain's beard at Cadiz and the Armada sailed from Lisbon to set the Infanta Isabel on the throne of England. I cannot remember that any of this material is used even for an incident. If the Indies are referred to it is only because an adventurer has returned from them with a fortune and there is a chance of robbing him. Certain personages have been to the wars in Flanders or set out for them. I have not read a story in which you are told what they did there. One would have thought that the expulsion of the Moriscos with the cruelty and extortion that attended it would have given Solorzano, for instance, one of the later picaresque authors, a subject he could have made good use of. For all you can tell, none of them took the smallest interest in the happenings of their time. They continued to relate the knaveries of innkeepers, the wiles of beggars, and the thefts of scullions. It seems all very odd till you remember that Jane Austen, during the Napoleonic wars, was content to describe (heaven knows, with exquisite humour) the sentimental dalliance of honest gentlefolk, and that Henry James, who beheld the rise of the United States from a provincial community to a world Power, exercised his extreme subtlety on the ænemic passions of the fashionable world. I do not blame this; I merely remark on it: it may be that it is by a sound instinct that the novelist turns his back on the occurrences that are significant to the welfare of his country and the progress of civilisation to dwell upon the humdrum affairs of common life. There has only been one Sir Walter Scott and only one Tolstoi. It is true that the Moorish pirates ravaged the coasts of Spain and that the country was bankrupt and oppressed: the inns were shocking, the

innkeepers extortionate, and you might very well be given a cat for your dinner when you had ordered a hare.

Nor can the modern reader of these novels fail to be surprised at the small part that is taken by sex. I do not know whether this was due to the fear of the Inquisition (which kept a sharp eye on literary productions) or to the natural healthiness of the Spaniards, who looked upon copulation as a normal function of the human animal of no more (and no less) consequence than eating and drinking. The fact remains that the picaresque novels are uncommonly chaste. Now and then the roguish hero casts an amorous glance on a lady of the town, but he is cheated of his money and sent unsatisfied away. Even this is rare. More often the young man's thoughts turn to the well-dowered maiden or the rich widow. His raptures have a practical basis. In such of these books as have a heroine for protagonist a good many assaults are made on her virtue (the Spaniard then as now conceiving sensibly that the first thing to do with a comely wench was to put her to bed), but she cunningly eludes pursuit; she makes good use of the effect she has produced to rob her admirers of their money, but does not surrender the precious jewel of her virginity except under the blessing of the Church. There is thus a certain amount, though little, of honest-to-god lechery, but there is no love. On this subject I shall have a little more to say presently.

For love you must go to the autobiographical fragments which Agustin de Rojas inserted in his *Diverting Journey*. And in the life of himself written by the soldier Miguel de Castro there is an account of his passion for a courtesan at Naples which, sordid though it is, has the authentic thrill. It is not a romantic love that he feels for the pretty trollop, but it is love all the same, fierce, jealous, eager, a love for which he will incur any danger and take any risk, a love capable even of generosity and self-sacrifice. Incidentally the story gives an unexpected and agreeable light on the relations between soldiers and their officers, servants and masters. For Miguel de Castro at this time was body-servant to Don Francisco de Cañas, commander of the garrison. Having discovered his servant's infatuation, Don Francisco, benevolently, though surely unreasonably, sought by reproof and good advice to wean him from it. But finding that notwithstanding his admonitions the gallant spent all his nights with the harlot, he had the doors of the palace locked and the keys brought to his own chamber. Miguel de Castro stole them. Then he made him sleep

in an inner chamber from which he could only get by passing through the room in which he himself slept. The lover found means to outwit him. Finally in despair he sentenced him to a month's imprisonment, thinking that thus he would put a stop to the attachment that not only outraged his sense of propriety, but jeopardised the soul of his unworthy servant. This is how Miguel de Castro describes what followed:

"On issuing from the prison and chamber of my seclusion, it was not half an hour before I went forthwith to see the crocodile of my ignorance, the siren of my senses, the rock of Sisyphus on my shoulders, the wheel of Ixion of my torment; for there was the Wagoner's Rest of my sensibility, the hostelry of my faculties, the theatre of my delights, the idol of my sacrifices, and the law of my faith."

A lover can't say fairer than that.

The best and most readable of the picaresque novels is *Gil Blas* and it was written by a Frenchman. The Spaniards of course would never acknowledge this and they claim that it is just a hodge-podge of the Spanish novels. This is not a fact. It is true that Le Sage used episodes that he had found in them, especially in the *Life of Marcos de Obregon*, but that was in the habit of the time. If this were a work of erudition rather than, as I hope, of entertainment I could give a long list of the authors who had in this manner made free with the writings of their predecessors. No less a person than Molière not only slavishly copied Moreto's play *El Desden con el Desden* in his play *La Princesse d'Élide*, but translated a number of its scenes almost word by word. Spanish authors were no more scrupulous. Moreto himself took the plays of earlier authors, rewrote them (to their advantage), and presented them without apparent compunction as compositions of his own. So Le Sage borrowed when it suited his purpose; but for the book's chief merits, its wit and humour, its pace, liveliness, and variety he is indebted to nobody but himself. *Gil Blas*, like the picaresque novels in general, is written in the first person. Now, experience has shown that it is very difficult to make the teller of his own story distinct and palpable, and *Gil Blas* himself is somewhat shadowy. But he is not, as are too many of the picaroons, a thorough rogue. He was something of a scamp in his early youth, but when he behaves badly he is aware of it, and little by little he becomes a very likeable fellow. He is loyal, affectionate, grateful for favours received, and industrious to help his friends, so that

you are satisfied to see him in the end prosperous and happy. It is true that, following a prevalent fashion (as Fielding did), he interrupts the narrative with the inapposite stories of persons chance throws in his path, but he does it in a reasonably probable manner. But what makes *Gil Blas* excel its Spanish prototypes is that it has form. That is a virtue that seems to come naturally to the French and form is by far the least of the qualities that go to make a good novel.

Spain has only produced one work which has a sure place in the literature of the world. This of course is *Don Quixote*. It is unnecessary for me to say anything of its merits. They shine like the sun at noon. The knight is the most human, the most lovable character that the wit of man has devised. One cherishes him with a tenderness that, alas, one can seldom feel in this difficult world for creatures of flesh and blood. Don Quixote and his Squire are immortal. Spaniards, at least those with any pretensions to culture, read this book as we in England in the past read the Bible. I met a distinguished man of letters in Madrid who told me he had read it fifty times. They have come to regard it as a valid representation of their own character with its gross materialism and lofty idealism. When they read it they comprehend the emotions which started their ancestors on the adventures which made Spain the most powerful, the richest country in the world and then to its ruin and abasement led them to squander wealth and human lives to force upon heathen and heretic the faith of the Holy Catholic Church. To claim that there are sundry imperfections in the book that means so much to them is almost a personal affront.

Yet I think it would be hard to find a work so great that had so many defects. As we know, it was begun as a short story and it was the success it had when Cervantes read it to his friends that induced him, it is said, to make it into the book we know. It is interspersed with short stories and with the pastoral episodes which were popular in his day. The critics of the time carped at these irrelevances, and in the second part Cervantes introduced them into the body of his narrative with more plausibility. The wise-cracks of Sancho Panza, which at the beginning fall so naturally from his lips, are later piled on one another so extravagantly as to grow tedious. The device by which much of the action of the second part is carried on is clumsy. Cervantes feigned that the first part had been published and read by many of

the persons with whom the knight on his last journey came in contact. He thus prevented the reader from indulging in that willing suspension of disbelief which persuades him that what he reads is true. The last chapters are scamped. But the greatest blot, which must outrage the feelings of any sensitive person, is that Cervantes made his hero do something that it was impossible for him to do. He tells us that Don Quixote confessed on his death-bed that he had invented the account of his adventures in the Cave of Montesinos. Everyone knows that the knight was incapable of saying anything that he did not think was true. When Cervantes made him admit a lie he maligned his hero and stultified himself.

Coleridge said of this great book that it is one to read through once or twice only, but to read in repeatedly. That is very good advice.

VII

IT would be absurd to suppose that one could acquire from the picaresque novels more than a partial knowledge of the behaviour, the ways of thought, and the sensibility of the Spanish in the Golden Age. They present but one side of the picture. For another you must go to the drama, which at no time and in no country has flourished so luxuriantly as in Spain during the hundred years that ended with Calderon's death. Now, the drama is a popular art and in order to succeed a play must reflect the temper of the age. A play is a close collaboration between the author, the actors, and the audience, and the audience cannot play their part unless they can share and share alike in the author's conception. The sentiments that he sets before them must be those with which they are in sympathy. He must feel as they feel and his morality must be the same as theirs. Sometimes he expresses sentiments and a morality that his audience have felt but from timidity or obtuseness have refused to put into words; and then he is admiringly described as a dramatist of ideas. The revolt of Nora came as a shock to the world of her day, but the notion would have seemed preposterous (and so the play would have failed) unless there had been an obscure but deep-seated feeling among the spectators that woman had a right to her own personality. Thus by reading the drama of a period you can get a

very good impression of what men and women thought on the great issues that influenced their lives.

But if the drama presents an adequate picture of the way men think and feel, contrariwise it influences their thoughts and feelings. It gives voice to the inclinations that they have repressed and by the vividness of its appeal enables them to carry into action the promptings of their hearts. The contagiousness of the emotions it arouses, the man-to-man address, give it a power incomparably greater than that of fiction. Far more wives left their husbands because Nora slammed the door in Torvald Helmer's face than ever men shot themselves because Werther suffered from the melancholia of the age. Though it must be admitted that suicide is a drastic and often painful affair. The dramatist not only represents the persons of his period, but by giving to their instinctive tendencies living shapes forms them after the pattern he has devised. So Mr. Coward not only portrayed the querulous frivolity of the decade that followed the Great War, but created a generation of querulously frivolous people. It is owing to this power that the playwright wields that the Church has always, and it may be with wisdom, looked upon the drama askance.

Now, when you come to study the Spanish theatre from this point of view you make some very interesting discoveries. The field is enormous and I do not suppose even the most industrious student has completely covered it. Lope de Vega alone wrote as many plays as all the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists put together. He is said to have written two thousand two hundred. Nearly five hundred of these are extant. I have read twenty-four. I have read them with pleasure, but I find in myself no overwhelming desire to read more. His fertility was of course amazing and fertility is a quality to be praised in an author. It denotes physical energy, a gift a writer can as little do without as a tennis player, vitality, power of invention and variety of interest, which may from time to time create a masterpiece. I do not believe in your constipated geniuses. Lope de Vega said he had written twenty sheets every day of his life and more than a hundred comedies in twenty-four hours apiece. His contemporaries called him the Phoenix of Wits and Cervantes described him as a Prodigy of Nature. The reader (if he knows anything about men of letters) will, however, not be surprised to learn that there was no love lost between the two greatest authors of their time; and Lope, writing a chatty letter to a friend, remarked that there was no one so

stupid as to praise *Don Quixote*. Lope's first acted play was written when he was twelve and for hard on fifty years he was supreme in the theatre. When the younger generation came knocking at the door he firmly put his foot against it. He had a small pension from the King and as a retainer of the great house of Manrique enjoyed the emoluments of a chaplaincy at Avila; but his main source of livelihood was his pen. The managers paid fifty ducats for a play. A ducat seems to have been worth then something between five and ten shillings, but its purchasing power was at least ten times greater. Since this does not mean very much I have had the curiosity to note the relative prices that were paid for certain commodities. According to the contriver in Cervantes' *Coloquio de Cipión y Berganza* a man could live on a real and a half a day, and there were eleven reals in a ducat. From *La Gitanilla* I gather that ten ducats was a good price to pay for a donkey; fifty, as I have just said, for a three-act play; and when Cervantes was rescued from slavery in Algiers his ransom was five hundred. On the other hand when a middle-aged gentleman desired to be rid of Cervantes' daughter, who had been living under his protection, he had to provide her with a house and two thousand ducats. From this it is evident that a play was worth ten times as much as a donkey and a man of genius fifty times; but a maiden's innocence was worth more than four times as much as a man of genius. The price of a virtuous woman, as we know, is far above rubies.

Though certain critics carped (as critics will) because they thought that Lope did not pay sufficient respect to the precepts of antiquity, the public acclaimed him with a united voice. He was a popular dramatist. In that fortunate age this was not a term of reproach and Lope was thought highly of not only by the vulgar, but by the great, the good, and the intelligent. Though from time to time (as authors will) he spoke bitterly of the public, it was their suffrage he sought. "If anyone should cavil at my plays," he said, "and think that I wrote them for fame, undeceive him and tell him that I wrote them for money." He wrote to please. He was one of the few professional writers of his day and he had the professional writer's merits: he wasted no time on exposing his subject; incident followed incident, if not always with probability, generally with dramatic effect; his language was easy and natural, his dialogue pointed and quick. The necessity of getting through within a certain time and the greater necessity of holding the attention of an audience saved him from the two defects most

common to Spanish literature, diffuseness and digression. Critics nowadays complain that the ending of his plays is hurried and it is true that in the study the knots seem to be cut rather than untied. He was an improviser, and with the improviser it is always the same thing: his theme and his beginning, which he owes to his native inspiration, are for the most part brilliant; but when his inspiration fails him he has no solid sense of construction on which to fall back nor the energy of mind to enable him by the exercise of reason to bring his work to a logical conclusion. But I am not sure if these scamped endings of Lope's were offensive in performance. He knew that when you have interested your public in the presentation of your subject and held them, by the display of unexpected or thrilling events, during its development, when the end is in sight you had better come to it as quickly as possible. The audience are done with you and so long as they can get out of the theatre speedily do not care much what means you use to give them their liberty. They are quick to see the upshot and easily bored if a sense of propriety induces you to gather all your threads together into a single pattern. They will take an astonishing amount for granted. The wise author brings down his curtain while his audience are still under the spell.

In the intolerable *La Arcadia* Lope makes one of his characters say: "Not only must the poet know all the sciences, or at least their elements, but he must have the greatest experience of all things that happen on land or sea . . . he must know as well the habit and the way of life and the customs of all manner of people; and finally all those things of which they speak, treat, and have their being . . ." It is an ideal at which none must more deliberately aim than the dramatist. Certainly Lope de Vega put himself in the way of gaining the experience that would be useful to him. His life, a long story of romantic adventures, violent passions, and domestic virtue, reads like one of his own cape and sword plays. His first notable love affair was with the daughter of one actor and the wife of another. When she abandoned him for a more opulent admirer he revenged himself by writing scurrilous verses about her family. He was arrested, brought to trial, and on pain of death exiled from Madrid. But in a short time he returned and ran away with Isabel de Urbina, whose father was King-at-Arms. He married her and immediately set sail in the Great Armada. He used the paper on which he had written verses to the fickle actress as gun-wads. He saw his brother killed by his side. His wife died

and three years later he married the daughter of a pork-butcher. In the interval he was prosecuted for his relations with a certain Antonia Trillo and fell in love with an actress called Micaela de Lujan. He had children by his wife and children by his mistress. By a happy coincidence each was brought to bed of a son, one only a few months after the other, and he proudly called them Lope Felix and Carlos Felix respectively. The pork-butcher's daughter died in childbirth about the middle of August 1613 and in September Lope in the retinue of Philip III went to Segovia. He lived with the actress Jeronima de Burgos. "Here I have seen the lords prowling around my house," he writes; "the gallants come, but with less money than we needed." It looks as if the Phoenix of the Age was not above a bit of pimping when the occasion arose. At the beginning of the following year, being then a little over fifty, he determined to enter the priesthood and in March 1614 was ordained. His progenitiveness did not abandon him, for he had two children by Marta de Nevares Santoyo, whom he celebrated as Amarilis in an eclogue, and continued to write plays, a great deal of poetry, and some prose. He was a conscientious priest. He belonged to a pious fraternity that buried poor clerics, clothed the naked, and assisted the needy; and as a familiar of the Inquisition he presided over the burning of a heretic monk. He performed these duties with Christian charity. He had an oratory in his modest house and spent there much time in prayer. He scourged himself so that the walls of his room were spattered with blood. Fray Francisco de Peralta in the sermon he preached at his funeral related that once a man came to his house and challenged him to a duel.

"Let us go outside," he cried, drawing his sword.

"Let us go," answered Lope, slowly putting on his cloak, "I to the altar to say Mass, and your worship to assist me."

When he was buried, a great throng following, the funeral procession went out of the direct path so that it might pass by the convent of the Trinitarian nuns where his bastard daughter had taken the vows.

Though Lope de Vega wrote plays of all kinds, romantic, historical, pastoral, and religious, his fame rests chiefly on the comedies of intrigue known as cape and sword. These present a vivid and varied picture of life as it may have been led during the Golden Age. His plays can be read with interest; a warmer feeling than that they can now excite in few. With all his fluency, profuse

invention, eye for dramatic effect, and nimble sense of life's multifarious scene, he had a commonplace mind. He was a good-natured, normal, sensual man. In fact he was exactly what a dramatist should be if he is to have success. His personality was of no great importance. His characterisation is thin and there is not one of his noble, passionate heroes that can be distinguished from another. Sometimes his women have the rudiments of individuality and occasionally show a trace of sardonic humour. His men never. His heroines know what they want, a man, and have no hesitation in using every means at hand to get him. Lope's great subject matter is love, love at first sight, of a devastating kind, which stops at nothing to obtain its satisfaction; but a reputable love for the most part, whose end is marriage: the great lord may have no intention of fulfilling his promises, but his lady will not admit him to her bed till he has made them. And oddly enough it is a love that ceases as suddenly as it arose when marriage is out of the question. So, in *Lo Cierito por lo Dudoso*, Don Pedro, the King, is enamoured of Doña Juana and when she tells him that his brother, Don Enrique, has kissed her, in his fury gives orders that he shall be killed; but no sooner does he discover that Doña Juana and Don Enrique are already married than his passion is immediately extinguished and he gives the pair his blessing. And in another play, called *Por la Puente, Juana*, when a nobleman gets the object of his affections alone on an island in the Tagus she has but to tell him (in a hundred and fifty lines) the story of her life for him to hand her over to her affianced husband. Indeed he carries his generosity so far as to provide her with a dowry.

It would be impertinent in a foreigner to attempt to judge the merit of Lope's verse. I can recognise its ease and grace. It is not often monotonous. In his frequent scenes of rapid, broken dialogue he manages with uncommon skill to preserve the pattern. But I do not feel anywhere the ring of true poetry. When he indulges in general reflections he is platitudinous and it requires a good deal of patience to read him when he breaks into a purple passage. You wish then that the Renaissance had never rediscovered Antiquity, so that you might have been spared these tedious allusions to the gods of Greece and the iron-hearted heroes of Rome. And there must be few who can suffer gladly the carnations of so many ladies' cheeks, the pearls of their teeth, the snow of their brow, and the marble of their hands.

But what a happy state of affairs when an audience was ravished by verse for its own sake! Of course few people could read and their ears were more sensitive than ours. Books were scarce; the reader will remember that in the castle of so respectable a family as the Loyolas there were but two books. I think it is not merely patriotic bias that makes me believe that in an English country house of the same standing you would find to-day not only the Bible and the works of Shakespeare, but also a good many bound volumes of *Punch* and *Ruff's Guide to the Turf*. I know little of the mysteries of versification and I must accept from the histories of literature the fact that Lope de Vega was a master of all its forms. His plays, to tell the truth, can be best appreciated if you look upon them as operatic "books" in which verse takes the place of music. He will write a bravura passage in which three persons, for instance, embroider upon an idea, each one ending his speech with the same refrain, so that you can almost hear the burst of applause that greets the ingenuity. Sometimes a character will present a theme in four lines and then enlarge upon it in stanzas each of which ends with one of the four lines. It is as much a set aria as *La Donna è mobile*. In one of his plays that I have read all the soliloquies are cast in sonnet form. It gives a formal distinction that must have been very grateful to an audience sensible to such elegancies. It further gives the soliloquies a pleasing brevity. I have read somewhere that the courtiers of Philip III used to amuse themselves by carrying on among themselves conversations in verse. It was an amiable accomplishment.

Theatres were originally the yards of houses. At the back was the stage and persons of quality viewed the play from the windows of the houses built round the yard. In the yard stood the populace. Raised benches surrounded it for those who could afford to pay for seats, and the women sat in a gallery, called the *cazuela* or stew-pan, which had a separate entrance and into which men were not admitted. Nevertheless it was hard to keep them out, and I have read that Bernardo de Soto, having got in, raised the petticoats and touched the legs of the women who were watching the play, by which great scandal was occasioned. So keen was the demand for seats that sometimes windows and benches were left as heirlooms. The public that stood in the pit, students, artisans, and ruffians, was most disorderly. As many of them as could got in without paying and there were frequent brawls at the door as they tried to force their way past the doorkeeper who took the

entrance money. Once in, they waited noisily. Itinerant vendors walked about crying their wares (as they still do at bull-fights), selling fruit and candy; someone would throw down money in a handkerchief and the vendor, wrapping up in it what was wanted, would throw it back. Now and then a spectator would be tapped on the shoulder and asked if he would pay for a dozen oranges for a woman he had ogled in the stew-pan. Performances began at two in winter and at three in summer. They were given by the light of day and at first under the open sky, so that a downpour of rain cut the play short and the money was returned. At the appointed hour, more or less, the musicians appeared, with guitars and harps, and sang a ballad. After this a member of the company came on the stage and recited a monologue, called a *loa*, which was designed to put the spectators in good humour. Then the first act of the play was given. It proceeded in so great an uproar that the words could often not be heard. When the public were displeased they broke into shrill whistles, cat-calls, and scurrilous abuse. The women in the stew-pan were as vociferous as the men in the pit. But when they were moved by a noble sentiment or charmed by an adroit piece of versification they shouted *Victor, Victor!* To prevent the audience from being bored a short, often topical, farce followed the first act. This was called an *entremes*. It was accompanied by music and ended with a dance. Then came the second act, another *entremes*, and the last act. But the public had a passion for short pieces called *jacaras*, which were roistering ballads in thieves' slang, and the mob clamoured for them at every interval. A final dance brought the proceedings to a close. The audience surely got their money's worth.

It is plain from these interruptions how little they cared to preserve the illusion of reality. Each act was almost a self-subsistent part of the general entertainment. The audience were not, one imagines, expected to enter into the emotions of the characters represented, but rather with cool minds to watch them. So they were able to give more attention to the ingenuity of the intrigue and the elegance, the variety, and the appositeness of the language. Thus there was small reason why improbability and incoherence should incommode them. So long as a situation was effective they were not such fools as to ask how it had been come by.

I should like to give some description of one of Lope's plays, but it so happens that the play that I find most interesting was not

written by him at all. It is called *La Estrella de Sevilla* and is printed in all the editions of his works. The experts however have shown (I do not know how, for I have not read their remarks) that Lope did not write it, and it remains of unknown authorship. Still, it has so many of his characteristics, it is so typical of the drama of the period, its characters and their motives conform so well with the prepossessions of the Spaniards of that day, that it does not matter who wrote it. It is an interesting piece, and I should think would act uncommonly well.

Don Sancho the Brave, King of Castile, makes a state entry into Seville and among the crowd who watch his progress catches sight of a most lovely young woman seated at her window. In the Spanish way he falls violently in love with her. She is known as the Star of Seville. Her name is Estrella, and this is very unfortunate, for it gives the various characters in the play an opportunity, which they seize with one accord, to be abundantly poetic. Their play upon the name in harmonious numbers and show their wit in all manner of conceits. Even the heroine, when catastrophe befalls her, bewails her fate with every possible reference to her pretty name. She is the sister of a brave and gallant gentleman, Busto Tavera by name. The King is determined to gratify his desire that very night. His confidant suggests that Tavera should be granted favours, and the King, sending for him, appoints him commander of the troops on the frontier. When Tavera declines the honour he makes him a gentleman-in-waiting at his court. He declares besides that he will marry Estrella according to her station.

Now Estrella loves, and is loved by, a gentleman of Seville, Don Sancho Ortiz, and their marriage has been arranged. When Tavera, suspicious because the King has thus favoured him, tells them that his royal master has decided to dispose of her himself, and dower her, they are dismayed. Night comes, and the King, disguised, is wandering about Estrella's house. Tavera comes out and recognises him. The King tells him that he desires to see his house, but Tavera, though with respect, refuses him admission. Don Arias, the confidant, however, manages to get in and, telling Estrella of the King's passion, offers her on his behalf the wealth of Castile. He offers her towns of which she shall be suzerain and for husband a gentleman of birth. The virtuous creature refuses with scorn. Then he suborns her slave and maid-servant. Under a promise in black and white (since the promises of kings are often

broken) of freedom and a thousand ducats a year, she agrees to betray her mistress. When Tavera is out and not expected back till dawn she introduces the King into the house. But before he has set eyes on Estrella, Tavera returns and, coming upon a strange man, is about to kill him, when the King (not so brave as his name indicates) tells him who he is. Busto Tavera feigns not to believe him. It is impossible that the King, disguised and alone, should have forced his way into his loyal subject's house, and he swears to punish the intruder for venturing to make such a pretence. Swords are drawn. The noise brings in servants and in the confusion the King escapes. Tavera guesses that it is the slave who has let the King in and forces her to confess. He upbraids his sister for having thus dishonoured him, but, convinced by her protestations that she was no party to what has happened, decides to marry her at once to Don Sancho Ortiz. For himself he will seek safety in flight.

The King, frustrated and angry, decides to have Tavera killed. His confidant suggests a safe man to do the deed. This is no other than Don Sancho Ortiz. While they are talking they see a body swinging from a rope. It is the slave with the King's written promise in her hand. The King sends for Don Sancho and orders him to kill a man who has grossly outraged him. He promises in reward to grant him any boon he asks. He tells him that he may kill the man by guile, but this Don Sancho proudly refuses to do; he will kill him only in fair fight. The King gives him a written order so that he may disculpate himself, but Don Sancho, very imprudently trusting in the King's word, tears it up. Then the King hands him another paper on which is written the victim's name. When Don Sancho leaves the palace the news is brought him that Tavera has decided that he shall marry Estrella immediately. He is transported with delight. But he opens the paper the King has given him and sees with horror that it is Tavera he must kill. He loves him more than a brother; he realises that if he kills him he will lose Estrella; but his hesitation is short; his loyalty to the King bids him put away his private feelings, and meeting Tavera he picks a quarrel and kills him. The dying man leaves Estrella to his protection. The *alcaldes* of the city come, accompanied by guards, and arrest him. While Estrella is dressing for her wedding the *alcaldes* bring to the house the body of Busto Tavera and tell her that it is her lover who has killed him.

The King is informed that Don Sancho confesses to the murder,

but will not say why he committed it, whereupon he sends to him with the command that he shall tell his reasons for the wilful deed and if he has a paper to prove what he says, produce it. Don Sancho says that he has no paper (we have indeed seen him destroy it before the King's eyes) and being sworn to secrecy can say nothing. Though betrayed, he will not betray. Then Estrella goes to the King and begs him to give up Don Sancho to her so that she may herself avenge her murdered brother. The King, thinking she will kill him and glad of a way out of his very awkward predicament, gives her an order to the governor of the prison. She presents herself disguised and when her lover is handed over to her tells him that she has provided for him a horse and money so that he may escape. Don Sancho, not recognising her (it was well known that when you were disguised even your own mother couldn't know you), desires to know to whom he owes his liberty and eventually forces her to discover herself. When he sees Estrella he refuses to accept it and notwithstanding her entreaties returns to his prison. Meanwhile, Don Arias, the confidant, has tried to induce the King to acknowledge that Tavera was murdered by his order; but this the King cannot bring himself to do. He fears the anger of Seville and the effect on Castile of a report of such treachery. The resourceful confidant then suggests that he should persuade the justices to commute the death penalty to banishment. The justices are sent for. The King gives them plausible reasons for the step he desires them to take, but they plead the majesty of the law; they represent the King and, though as vassals he may command them anything, as judges they must act according to their conscience: Don Sancho must die. The King is troubled and confused; he is indeed in a most embarrassing situation. Now Don Sancho and Estrella are introduced. Don Sancho still refuses to speak. He demands death so that he may atone for the killing of his friend. The King is shattered by all this nobility and admits at last that it was he who gave the order for Tavera's despatch. The justices yield; if the King did this it could only be because he had just cause; not theirs to reason why. Don Sancho, exonerated, will go into voluntary exile and, reminding the King of his promise to grant him whatever boon he demands, asks that Estrella should become his wife. The King, perhaps thinking that she has caused him quite enough trouble, is willing, but Estrella declares that she cannot eat the bread and sleep in the bed of Busto Tavera's assassin.

"Sir," she tells the King, "though I love and adore him, the man who killed my brother can never be my spouse."

"And I," adds Sancho, somewhat tamely, "though I love her, see that it would be unjust."

Thus the play ends. Not the least of its merits is that it has hardly any comic relief. You would have thought that with ballads and dances and comediettas during the intervals the Spanish audience had enough distraction to enable them to support the seriousness of a three-act play. Not so. The comic servant was obligatory. His business was to pair off with the heroine's maid, and in *La Hermosa Fea*, as though Lope were ridiculing the tedious convention, the *Gracioso* complains that for once there is no waiting-woman for him to marry. But I have a notion that his dramatic purpose was not only to give the groundlings occasion for laughter: with his realistic attitude and caustic sarcasm he represented the opposition of common sense to the idealism and high-flown bombast of the other personages. They might sacrifice themselves for love or duty, they might risk their lives for honour's sake, the *Gracioso* was there to point out that a wench, a square meal, and a whole skin were better than all your heroics. He was so popular a figure because he corresponded with something deep and permanent in the Spanish temper. They have always recognised that there were two sides in them, and that is why (somewhat late in the day, it is true) they have accepted Cervantes' immortal novel as a true epitome of their character. They are at the same time the Knight of the Dolorous Countenance and Sancho Panza. Perhaps they were never more conscious of this than during the Golden Age. They had conquered vast empires in America and all Europe acknowledged their power; but they were hungry, they were hungry all the time. Some force impelled them to foolhardy adventures of universal conquest, and to the even more perilous adventures of the spirit, and they hazarded them because they could not help themselves; but all the time, at the back of their minds, was the uneasy feeling that all this was moonshine, and a full belly and a bed to sleep on were the only realities.

Lope had a lively sense of humour and he made his *Graciosos* living persons; they were ingenious rascals, ironists with a cynical wit; but with Calderon they are only ignorant clowns. Calderon had no vestige of humour and his comic servants are of a monstrous dullness. Outside Spain, Calderon is the most celebrated of

the Spanish dramatists. The romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century held him in high esteem and their judgment has been accepted by succeeding generations, who have not much bothered about him. *La Vida es Sueño* has the reputation of being a great play. I am not sure that it is his best. I think it is more admired than read. Calderon had of course notable merits. He had the mystical feeling, common to many Spaniards of his age, that the world of sense we live in is but a part of the spiritual world and to this owes its significance. It gives certain of his plays a nobility that dramatists have seldom achieved. They say he was a great poet, but, speaking with the diffidence proper to a foreigner, I should have said that it was his mind that was poetic; to me his verse is monotonous and the conceits with which, following the fashion of the time, he stuffed it full are wearisome. He had an intolerable verbosity, and when he sets out on a poetic flight it seems as though nothing could stop him. He had little power of invention. He had no sense of character. Few of his personages live. But he had personality, a grim, cold, and yet passionate personality; and personality, I think, is the only thing that keeps a writer alive. With all his faults he can be read now more easily than Lope de Vega. There is in such of his plays as I have read (for I have read but a dozen out of the couple of hundred he wrote) a sense of the mystery of things that can hardly fail to move. You seem to hear in the distance, faintly audible, while this or the other is happening, the sinister drums of unseen powers. But it is not my business to offer the reader a criticism of Calderon. My interest in him is for the light he throws on the character of the Spaniards of his day. His great success proves that his instincts corresponded with the prepossessions of his audience.

His religious sense was profound, and indeed, after having a natural son or two, he was ordained. (The Spanish writers were prolific not only with their pens, they produced enough bastards to man a regiment and fill the nunneries of a fair-sized town.) He was passionately faithful to the Church and only naturally expected the Church to do the right thing by him. When he was not given certain preferment that he expected he wrote to the Cardinal Archbishop and said he would write no more plays till the injustice was remedied. It was. Happy days for the dramatist! Now a playwright's decision to write no more would be accepted with equanimity. At the time he wrote, the condition of Spain

was desperate; ruin faced the country and a large part of its territory was wrested from the Spanish crown. The Spaniards clung all the more fiercely to the faith that had once seemed their greatest glory. But it was a cruel faith, cruel to those that practised its precepts and cruel to those that neglected them. With many it was no more than an extravagant and senseless superstition. In an outrageous play called *La Devocion de la Cruz*, Calderon allows his hero, guilty of shocking crimes, to be saved because he has always had a devotion to the Cross and while he committed them had consistently trusted in its efficacy for salvation. And Don Fernando, Prince of Portugal, when captured by the King of Morocco refuses to allow the city of Ceuta to be surrendered to ransom him because the Portuguese had made it Catholic and he could not suffer its churches to be turned into mosques. The thought of it, in his own words, strikes him mute (which however does not prevent him from going on for another hundred lines), takes his breath away, chokes him with pain, breaks his heart, raises his hair on end, and leaves him all of a tremble.

But in this scene there are two fine lines. The audience may very well have thought them sublime.

Por qué no me das à Ceuta?

Porques es de Dios y no es mia.

"Why," the King asks his captive, "will you not give me Ceuta?"

"Because it is God's, not mine."

Another thing that makes Calderon's plays interesting is his preoccupation with the point of honour, and here again one can imagine that he faithfully portrayed the ruling passion of the times. Even the picaroons are sensitive of their honour and will stick at nothing to avenge an affront upon it. A slight unknown to any but him who suffers it, a suspicion thrown on the virtue of his wife, though he knows it to be unfounded, will rankle, depriving a man of sleep, driving him crazy, till he can wipe it out in blood. In no play of Calderon's is this more clearly shown than in *El Medico de su Honra*. Though he loves his wife passionately and knows that she loves him, when Don Gutierrez discovers that the King's brother has taken a fancy to her he is distracted with jealousy. Doña Mencia, his wife, has refused to listen to the Prince's declarations, but he knows that the Prince has set foot in his house. He has no doubt that she is faithful to him, but cannot endure the outrage to his honour. He kills her in cold blood. And in *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, to my mind Calderon's finest play, the

mayor, when the captain of a troop on the march to Portugal seizes and rapes his daughter, begs the seducer on his bended knees to marry her. Though a peasant he is rich and he offers the seducer all his fortune if he will make good by marriage the wrong he has done. The captain scornfully refuses to mingle his noble blood with that of a peasant. When the mayor realises that the captain will not make amends, sternly, but with expressions of great respect for his quality, he has him strangled. Only thus can the injury be satisfied.

The life of the actors was, as Cervantes said, one of intolerable labour. They were up at dawn to learn their parts. They rehearsed from nine to twelve, dined, and went to the theatre; they left it at seven; and then, however tired, if important people wanted them, the mayor, the judge, or what not, off they had to traipse and give a show. They earned their bread in the sweat of their brows; and Agustin de Rojas, of whom I have already spoken, said that there was not a negro in Spain nor a slave in Algiers whose lot was harder than theirs. He has left a lively picture of the life led by these strolling players on the road. Agustin de Rojas was celebrated for the *loas* he wrote, the monologues with which the performances at the theatre began, and wanting to publish them he hit upon an ingenious device. He contrived a series of conversations between four actors, Rios, Ramirez, Solano, and himself, as they wandered from city to city to fulfil their engagements, and to while away the tediousness of the journeys, for they went on foot, he recited to them his *loas*. His companions must have been good-natured to listen to some of them. Their ingenuity is very trying. They bristle with conceits and abound in learning, biblical, mythological, and historical. Some praise the merits of the cities the actors are about to visit; there is one in praise of the letter A and another in praise of the days of the week. The amusing ones are those in which the author vivaciously narrates his own adventures. Perhaps the reader will not have forgotten the curious love story that emerges from his tale. Fortunately he needed a good deal of padding, and between his recitations the four players talk of one thing and another. On one occasion Rios recounts his experiences on a certain journey as follows:

"We left the city of Valencia, Solano and I, on account of a misfortune, one of us on foot and without a cloak, and the other walking and with only a doublet. We gave our traps to a boy, who got lost in the town, and so we were left gentlemen of the road.

We arrived at a village at night, exhausted, with only eight *cuartos* between us. Having nothing to eat we went to a hostelry and asked for a bed, but they said there was none to be had because there was a fair. Seeing the small chance there was of our finding one, I went to an inn and said that I was a merchant from the Indies. The hostess asked me if we had pack-horses and I answered that we had come by cart and that while our goods were coming she should make us up a couple of beds and prepare supper. She did so, and I went to the mayor of the village and telling him that a company of players was passing through asked his leave to act a play. He asked me if it was religious. I told him it was and he gave me leave; I went back to the inn and told Solano to run over the *auto* of Cain and Abel and then go to a certain place and collect money because we were to give a show that night. Meanwhile I went to look for a drum, made a beard out of a piece of sheepskin and went through the whole village announcing my play. There were a lot of people in the place and many came. This done, I put the drum aside, took off my beard, and going to the hostess told her that my goods were arriving and she must give me a key to the door of my room so that I could lock them up. She asked me what they were and I said grocery. She gave me the key and I took the sheets off the bed and pulled down an old hanging and two or three bits of stuff and, so that I shouldn't be seen coming down, made them into a bundle, threw it out of the window and flew down like the wind. When I got to the yard the host called me and said: 'Master Indian, d'you want to see a show by some strolling players who have just come? It's good.' I said I'd go, and hurriedly went to look for the things that we were to act our play with, but though I looked everywhere I couldn't find them. Faced with this blow, as the job might get me a whipping, I ran to where Solano was taking in the money, told him what had happened, and said that he must stop collecting and we'd better make ourselves scarce with the cash. . . . That night we didn't go far and we kept off the high road, and in the morning we counted our money. We found three and a half reals in small change. Picture us wandering on, with money, but a bit scared; after about a league we saw a hovel, and when we reached it they treated us to wine from a gourd, milk from a trough, and bread from saddle-bags. We had breakfast and that night got to another village, where we set about earning our supper. I asked for leave to give a performance, got a couple of sheets, advertised

the show, got a guitar, invited the woman of the inn, and told Solano to collect the money. Finally, before a full house, I came out and sang the ballad, '*Afuera, afuera; aparta, aparta*'; after one couplet I dried up and the public couldn't make it out, but Solano began a *loa* and so made up for the shortage of music. I dressed myself in a sheet and began my part, and when Solano appeared as God the Father, with the other sheet on, but open in the middle, his beard stained with grape-skins and a candle in his hand, I thought I should die of laughing. The wretched public didn't know what had happened to him. After this I came on as a clown and did my *entremes*, then went on with the play; but when I came to the point of killing the miserable Abel I'd forgotten the knife to cut his throat, so I took off my beard and cut it with that. It caused an uproar and the crowd began to yell. I begged them to forgive our shortcomings as the company hadn't arrived yet. At last the audience struck and the innkeeper came and told us to get out because they wanted to give us a hiding. On this grand advice we made tracks and went off that very night with no more than the five reals we'd made. After spending this, selling the little we had left, often eating the mushrooms that we picked by the way, sleeping on the ground, walking barefoot (not on account of the mud, but because we had no shoes), helping the muleteers to load up, watering mules, and living for more than four days on turnips, we slunk into an inn one night where four carters who were there gave us twenty *maravedis* and a blood-pudding to give them a show. Leading this wretched existence, with all these misfortunes, we reached the end of our journey, Solano in his doublet, without his coat (which he'd pawned at an inn), and I bare-legged and shirtless, with a great straw hat full of holes, dirty linen breeches and my coat all torn and threadbare. I was in such rags I made up my mind to take a job with a pastry-cook, but Solano was so grand he wouldn't work. And then all of a sudden, when we were in this mess, we heard the beating of a drum and a boy advertising a show: 'The good play, *Los Amigos Trocados*, is being presented to-night at the town hall.' When I heard this my eyes opened as wide as a calf's. We spoke to the boy and when he recognised us he dropped his drum and began to dance for joy. I asked him if he had any money hidden away and he took out what he had wrapped in the tail of his shirt. We bought bread, cheese, and a cut of dried cod (which was very good there) and after eating went to find the manager (who was Martinazos), but I

don't know whether he was glad to see us when he saw how beggarly we were. Anyhow he greeted us and after we'd given him an account of all our trials we had dinner, and then he told us to delouse ourselves, because he was going to let us act and he didn't want a lot of lice in the costumes. That night, in fact, we helped him and the next day he gave us a contract for three-quarters of a real per show . . . We led this cheerful life for rather more than four weeks, eating little, travelling a lot, with our properties on our backs, and never saw a bed the whole blessed time."

I do not imagine that anyone can read this story without thinking it lucky for Rios that he had high spirits. He must have been a man whom it was difficult to disconcert. He was certainly no fool. When one of the party lamented the fickleness of some young person who had left him when he had no more money, he delivered himself of the following remarks:

"Brother," he said, "women are like bird-lime: good at sticking and bad at letting go. When a man spends his money on them and gives them presents, they do the dirty on him. And if he gives them nothing they say he's as mean as cat's meat. If he lets them gad about as much as they like, they think he's a fool; and if he won't, they think he's a bore. If he's in love with them they can't bear the sight of him, and if he isn't they won't give him a moment's peace."

"A girl, a vineyard, a pear tree, and a beanfield want a deal of looking after," observed one of the others.

"Sir," he replied, "you can't have a woman without a fault or a mule without a sire."

VIII

I MUST remind the reader that I am making no attempt to give an exhaustive account of the Spanish, and their manners and customs, in the Golden Age. That would need a much greater erudition than I can pretend to. I have read with a special object in view and I have not concerned myself with what could be of no use to me. When you want to write a novel set in a distant past you must acquaint yourself with the details of the daily life of the persons about whom you propose to write. You want to know when they ate their meals and what they ate, when they got up and when they went to bed, what the streets were like and how

they were lit at night, not necessarily to state them, but by a reference, seemingly casual, here and there to give your reader the atmosphere of the period. Now it is just these things that authors seldom tell you because they were common knowledge and there was no need to mention them. You must glean your information from a stray remark in a picaresque novel or from a couplet in a play. So a Victorian novelist might tell you that his dashing hero took a hansom, knowing that the reader would be well aware what sort of conveyance it was, and unmindful of the fact that in two or three centuries he would have no idea. It is not often that the novelists give you such specific information on any subject as Cervantes gives us in his account of Don Quixote's daily fare. Before he took it into his crazy head to range the world as a knight errant he was known as Alonso Quijana. He was what we should call a gentleman farmer and his household consisted of a house-keeper, his niece, and a handy man. His circumstances were modest. Every day of the week but two he had for his dinner the national dish of Spain, *olla podrida*, which was a mess of beef and mutton, but with more beef than mutton, because mutton was expensive, with cabbages and chick-peas, and onions and olives to give it flavour. To this on Sundays was added a brace of pigeons. For supper he ate a salad of chopped meat, ham, and onions soused in vinegar. On Fridays, obedient Catholic as he was, he ate nothing but lentils, and on Saturdays *duelos y quebrantos*, of which the English is "pains and sorrows". The learned have been at pains to discover what on earth this dish, so strangely named, could be, and as the learned will, some of them indulged in fanciful surmise. It was left to Don Francisco Marin in his monumental edition of *Don Quixote*, by an examination of the contemporary translations into French and Italian of Cervantes' immortal book, by attentive perusal of the classical plays, to discover beyond shadow of doubt that what Alonso Quijana ate on Saturdays was neither more nor less than eggs and bacon.

So may scholars three hundred years hence rack their brains and ransack their libraries in order to discover what sort of dish was bubble and squeak. Far be it from me to spoil their fun by telling them.

It is from the narratives of travellers that one must look for information on those particulars which, because, as I have said, they were so familiar, the native writers did not think it worth their while to tell of, but which naturally attracted the foreigner's

attention. I have read a great many such. For the most part they are dull reading. We sigh now when we read the jokes of the facetious traveller, our contemporary, who looks upon a journey into a strange country as an opportunity to exercise his wit and we yawn over the gushing word-pictures of the artist in prose. It may be that in three hundred years they will have their interest. We shall all be long since dead. The travellers of the sixteenth century seem to have had little curiosity. They visited the sights and were duly impressed by them. Sometimes they sought to instruct and then gave an account of the trade and manufactures of the places they passed through. They were much concerned with the intrigues of the court, the political situation, and the various persons of importance in their day. What was strange to them seemed on the whole unpleasant. They seldom thought it worth while to note a picturesque detail.

As one might perhaps have expected, it is from the letters and memoirs of women that one learns something of those minor usages which men in their narratives thought too trivial to mention. It is true that these accounts deal with life a generation or two later than the period with which I am dealing. But life in Spain has always changed slowly, and what was true of the seventeenth century was in all probability true of the sixteenth. Even to-day in the villages of Estremadura most of the houses have no glass in the windows and, as they were four hundred years ago, are closed against the cold of winter by shutters and against the heat of summer by canvas screens. You can still see a woman sitting at her spinning wheel by her door. You can still see women towards evening pass through the street on their way to the baker's with a tray of unbaked rolls on their heads. You can still see girls going to the well with a great earthenware pitcher balanced on the hip to fetch water. The lover still courts his mistress by night at the *reja*. The peasant still keeps his livestock, his cow, his donkey, his pigs, goats, and chickens on the ground floor of his house, and with his family lives on the floor above; and when he goes at dawn to his field to plough he harnesses his donkey to a wooden plough of the shape and style which the Romans taught his ancestors to make when they conquered the country.

Lady Fanshawe, the wife of the English Ambassador to Philip IV, in her memoirs gives interesting details of Spanish customs that seemed odd to her, and so does Madame de Villars, the wife of the French Ambassador, in her letters; but the most vivid account

we have of these matters is to be found in a book called *Relation du Voyage d'Espagne* by Madame d'Aulnoy. It is said now that this lady never went to Spain at all, but got her facts from the letters of her daughter who was married to a Spaniard. They are circumstantial and plausible, and they are confirmed by the *Memoirs* of Lady Fanshawe and the *Lettres de Madame de Villars*. It appears, then, that women never ate sitting at table with their husbands, not from respect, but because they were unused to sit on chairs. If they ate with their husbands at all they sat on the floor with their children, but as a rule husbands and wives ate separately. When Lady Fanshawe landed at Cadiz, the Governor asked her husband to sup with him, which he accepted, but told him that his wife would eat with her Ladyship, "retired from the men after the Spanish custom." The Governor would by no means consent to this and told him that this manner of eating (husbands and wives together) was by now the custom of many of the greatest families in Spain. Madame d'Aulnoy relates that when she went to dine with Don Agustin Pacheco, she found a table set for the men of the party and on the floor a cloth laid with three places for Doña Teresa, her host's wife, his daughter, and herself. The poor French lady sat with her legs tucked under her, but they began to ache, and she found it so awkward to eat in that position, leaning first on one elbow and then on the other, that in despair she gave up the attempt. Two of the gentlemen present noticed her predicament and proposed that she should sit at the table. This she was glad enough to do, but only if Doña Teresa would sit with her; this Doña Teresa would by no means consent to because men were present. Her husband, to her embarrassment, insisted, and she confessed that not only had she never sat on a chair before, but the notion of doing so had never entered her head. In one of Madame de Villars' letters she mentions that when women sat on chairs to their great discomfort it gave them pins and needles. In the houses of persons of condition there were Persian rugs on the floor and cushions on which women could sit. When it was desired to show honour to a visitor, female of course, more than one cushion would be brought for her, and Lady Fanshawe relates that when she had audience with the Queen she found her seated under a cloth of state upon three cushions. But though Spanish ladies used cushions it was only on ceremonious occasions and they much preferred to sit cross-legged on the floor.

Madame d'Aulnoy describes their dress in detail. They wore hooped skirts, such as you may see in Velasquez' portraits of Infantas, and under them so many petticoats that she marvelled that such small women could endure their weight. The toilet of a lady of quality was both complicated and summary. She used the white of an egg beaten up with sugar to wash her face and make it shine, then she rouged not only her cheeks, but her upper lip, her chin, her shoulders, and the palms of her hands. One of her maids then perfumed her from head to foot with the fumes of burning pastilles. Another maid filled her mouth with orange-flower water, which she expelled from her closed teeth in a fine rain over her mistress. This had the inconvenience of ruining the maid's teeth, but was said to give the water a sweeter scent.

Since, from long before the day of these distinguished women till our own, foreigners have inveighed against Spanish food, it is only fair to add that Lady Fanshawe had nothing but praise for it. Their water, she writes, "tastes like milk; their corn white to a miracle, and their wheat makes the sweetest and best bread in the world; bacon beyond belief; the Segovia veal much larger and fatter than ours; mutton most excellent; capons much better than ours. . . . They have the best partridges I ever eat, and the best sausages . . . their eggs much exceed ours; and so all sorts of salads, and roots, and fruits." She ends her enthusiastic account, which I have abbreviated, with the rather odd remark: "and there is no such water made as in Seville."

Men, when they travelled in Spain during the sixteenth century, were nearly always in a bad temper. And they had cause to be. In book after book the same complaints recur on the badness of the roads, the danger of brigands, the difficulties of supply, the rapacity of innkeepers and the verminous conditions of the inns. Even St. Teresa, notwithstanding her passion to mortify the flesh, sometimes found this so intolerable that she preferred to sleep on the floor rather than in bed. Wise travellers slept stark naked so that, whatever inconveniences they suffered during the night from fleas, bugs, and lice, their clothes, at least, when they put them on in the morning were free of them.

There are still a few inns in Spain that retain enough of their ancient character to show you what the weary traveller had to put up with. The best known of these is in the Plaza del Pozo in Cordova, because Cervantes stayed there. The house, of two storeys only and whitewashed, is of modest appearance. A

massive door, locked and bolted at night, affords admittance. Within is a vast, roughly paved courtyard. On the ground floor are the stables, each just large enough for a single horse or mule, beside which the groom or the muleteer could sleep. In the broad archway that leads from the street to the yard are two small kitchens for common use. In the old days innkeepers were forbidden by law to provide their guests with anything but bread and cooking utensils, so that they had to take their meals at the eating-houses, of which in the cities there were several, or cook the food they had brought with them. In the hostelry at Cordova the upper storey is reached by rough stone stairs. There is a wooden balcony all round, jutting out, with a rickety balustrade, and this balcony gives access to the rooms. There would be more than one bed in a room, sometimes four, and travellers were often obliged to double up with a stranger. If their appearance satisfied the hostess of their respectability she would tell a maid to put a clean sheet on the bed. The maids were expected not only to attend to their natural duties, but also to satisfy the sexual appetites of the muleteers, soldiers, or common travellers who needed relaxation after the toil of the day's march.

Bad weather might make the road impassable and then travellers were held up for some days. If, as of course sometimes happened, more than one party arrived at an inn, especially if in one of them there were ladies of consequence, gentlemen in another party would send to ask if they might pay their respects to them. Then they would all join together for supper and a pleasant evening would be spent at cards and in conversation. One receives the impression that, notwithstanding its discomfort, to spend a night or two at an inn might on occasion be pleasant enough. Lady Fanshawe says that "when they travel, they (the Spanish) are the most jolly persons in the world."

For all that, travelling was arduous, lengthy, and vexatious. The exactions of the custom-house officers were a constant source of complaint, for though the various kingdoms of Spain had been united by Ferdinand and Isabella, each one jealously maintained its privileges, and when the traveller passed from Catalonia to Aragon, and from Aragon to Castile, his luggage was inspected and he was required to pay duty both on entering and leaving the region. If he had gold he had to pay duty on this too. Nor was this all. On entering and leaving a city the guard at the gates claimed the right again to examine his effects and he was obliged to

offer them a gratuity (which of course they were reasonable enough to accept) not to exercise it.

Morel-Fatio in one of his books has printed an account of a journey from Rome to Barcelona, written by a member of the numerous suite of Camillo Borghese, afterwards Pope Paul V, who was sent by Clement VIII on a mission to Philip II. After a leisurely journey along the coast the party landed at Barcelona, where the Viceroy provided them with horses, mules, litters, and carts for the luggage, and after a few days' rest they set out across country. It was the middle of winter and there was deep snow on the ground so that more than once they had to get off their mounts and walk. The envoy was obliged to change his mule-borne litter for a hand one which the Viceroy had thoughtfully provided. In the principal towns they were entertained by dignitaries of the Church, who on their departure furnished them with an ample supply of food, for which they had cause to be thankful since otherwise they would have starved, for so poverty-stricken was the country no food could be had for love or money. The inns they had to put up at seem to have been unusually bad; at some to which they arrived half-frozen they found no wood with which to light fires and no beds, but only straw to sleep on. One wretched day followed another and at last they arrived at a village near Guadalajara, where they found a coach and four which the Duke of Infantado had sent for the papal envoy. In this he proceeded to Madrid, on the outskirts of which he was met by "many carriages and an infinity of noble gentlemen and prelates of quality", who accompanied him to the Nuncio's house, in which he was to lodge. The journey from Barcelona had taken them just twenty days.

Its anonymous narrator had little to say either of Madrid or of its inhabitants. The streets, he writes, were wide and would have been handsome but for their filth. The houses were squalid and ugly, mostly built of dried mud, and of one storey, since if a house had more, half of it was requisitioned by the crown for the use of grandees, ambassadors, and court officials. They had neither chimneys nor privies: "on this account they do their business in pots, which they empty out of the window, a thing which creates an intolerable stench . . . whence if they were not diligent to clean the streets frequently it would be impossible to pass through them, but withal it is impossible to go on foot." From *Lazarillo de Tormes* one learns that the necessary utensil was kept in an attic.

It was against the law to empty it into the street except between certain hours of the night and severe punishments were inflicted on those who did so. Servants were given a hundred lashes and banished from the city for six years and their masters if they had connived at their bad behaviour were banished for four years and heavily fined. The streets, lit at night only by the lamps that burned before the sacred images, were far from safe. You ran the danger of being set upon by a band of ruffians who might leave you dead and stripped of everything you had on you. If a gentleman had a grudge against another he did not hesitate to have him waylaid by hired assassins and stabbed to death. For the point of honour did not make the unreasonable demand that you should risk your own skin to dispose of an enemy when you could pay others to do the job for you. Nor did the path of courtship run without hazard. Unmarried women in theory lived in a seclusion almost as great as in Moorish times; the windows on the street were few and protected by the *reja*, the grille, typical of Spain, on which the iron-workers of the period lavished such charming invention; and from behind them they exchanged at night pleasant conceits with their admirers. But the gallant was so jealous, and so arrogant, that often he would not suffer another in the same street and swords were drawn to decide which should remain. Sometimes a stern parent or a punctilious brother would issue from the house and at the rapier's point drive away the unwelcome suitor.

But it was not only the filth of the streets that excited the disapproval of the chronicler of Camillo Borghese's mission. He states that both women and men were dirty in their persons and crude in their habits; when pressed by a natural necessity they relieved themselves in the open street without regard to the passers-by. Women, naturally dark of skin, plastered their faces with paint and though small increased their stature by wearing high pattens over their shoes. They dressed for the most part in black and used their head-shawls to cover their faces so that only the eyes could be seen. Less carping observers have remarked on the beauty of their eyes, the luxuriance of their hair and the grace of their carriage. He, however, found them impudent, presumptuous, and forward, since even in the street they would start talking to men they did not know. He was shocked when on one occasion he went with three companions, doubtless clerical, to saunter by the river bank and saw a woman bathing with nothing on but a

shift and a jacket; other women who were sitting there entered into conversation with the four Italians and when the bather came out of the water she let her shift fall, displaying such charms as she had, and without blushing began to dress before the startled eyes of the strangers. Our author states further that the Spaniards lived meanly and ate without delicacy. They used neither knives nor forks and everyone helped himself out of the common dish. Their victuals were badly cooked and badly served. When a gallant wanted to show his appreciation of his lady's merit he sent her food, not chocolates like the lover of to-day, but sausages and a ham, a pasty and a brace of capons. Far from offending her delicacy such a present was accepted with alacrity.

For though the sun might never set on the Spanish King's dominions and his fleets brought from the Indies year after year precious metals that to the imagination of the time appeared of fantastic value, his chosen people suffered from hunger. To get not enough to eat, but enough to prevent them from dying of starvation, was their constant preoccupation. The monasteries daily provided all comers with a dish of soup, and to get this thieves and students, beggars, soldiers and artisans waited patiently at their gates. It was natural then that fair ladies should have looked with favour on a swain who could supply them with the wherewithal to satisfy their appetites.

But hunger did not impair the cheerfulness of this virile people. They were perfectly ready to make a joke of an empty belly and they could have a good time on dry bread, an onion and a drink of water. They were gay, laughter-loving people and passionately addicted to amusement. I have told already how fond they were of the theatre. Besides this they had bull-fights, public shows and religious processions. A festival of the Church was a public holiday. Then the house-fronts were decorated with bright hangings, women, young and old, thronged the balconies, and the chattering, vivacious crowd surged in the streets. They never tired of going on little excursions to the Prado in Madrid or to the Alameda de Hércules in Seville. Men of quality went on horseback and the women, in all their bravery, their faces white with powder and their cheeks vermilion with cinnabar, on foot or by carriage. Then if no gallant accompanied them they were ready enough to enter upon a flirtatious contest of wits with a stranger. They did not hesitate to ask him to buy them oranges, sweets, and other kickshaws from the wandering vendors. At sunset they ate

the supper they had brought with them. All classes frequented these cool and pleasant places; the artisan with his wife and children picnicked happily in the immediate neighbourhood of the fine lady with her duenna and attendant swains. They relished back-chat and a gift for repartee made a man famous. Wherever people assembled, they amused themselves with the thrust and parry of persiflage. A woman was admired if she had a sharp reply to a wanton jest and you were sure of the applause of the crowd if you managed to make an inoffensive stranger look a fool.

It was the same spirit that made them take so much delight in practical jokes. This lamentable form of humour was of course practised at that time throughout Europe, but I think it was nowhere more prevalent than in Spain. The soil was favourable. The jokes played were coarse and brutal. Their aim was to subject the victim to an intolerable humiliation and since the Spaniard's honour meant so much to him he was more than others susceptible to the shame that was put upon him. People who read *Don Quixote* are outraged at the cruel game that is made of the gentle, crazy knight and indeed but for the enchanting conversations between master and man it would be hard to read the book now without distress. But to the readers of Cervantes' day these pranks were matter for uproarious mirth. They are at all events less foul than many you find in the masterpieces of picaresque literature. In Quevedo's *El Buscon* (a repository of practical jokes) an incident is related that is significant of the manners of the day. When the hero (a proper rascal certainly) went to study at Alcalá de Henares and, as was not unusual, to keep himself acted as servant to a richer undergraduate, on going for the first time to the University he was surrounded by the students, who with jeers and mocking laughter spat on him from head to foot till face and clothes were white as snow with spittle. In all the books I have read I do not remember more than one such jest that has brought a smile to my lips. For its rarity I will narrate it.

A serving-man, waiting for his master at the city gate of Guadala-jara, saw a funeral procession approach. Half a dozen priests, solemnly chanting, four friars, and a number of mourners. He called to them with a loud voice to stop. More surprised by the novelty of the occasion than impressed by his appearance they did so, and one of the priests asked him what he wanted.

"Who is the deceased?" he asked.

"If it matters to you, could you not have asked while we were going rather than stop us?"

He insisted that it was important for them to stay and tell him what he wished to know. They answered him:

"The deceased is a weaver called Juan de Paracuellos. He died in four days from kidney trouble. He leaves a wife, young and poor, called Maria de la O, and three children of whom the eldest is not six. Now of what importance is it that you should have this tiresome information?"

One of the dead man's two brothers, who were following the bier, told them to go on.

"Stop, I repeat," cried the joker. "And you, defunct weaver, by the power and virtue of my charmed words, I order you to rise hale and hearty and return to the tangled making of your stuffs."

They all marvelled to hear this mysterious exorcism and put the bier down on the ground. Attracted by the noise the neighbours, men, women, and children, crowded round.

"For the second time," he went on, "I command you, obstinate corpse, to rise hale and hearty and return to finish the cloth that you had begun."

None of those present could make up his mind whether this was a madman or a wizard who in the sight of all dared to make so strange a charge. Neither his face nor his habit suggested the saint. They paused. They stared, without so much as batting an eyelash, at the dead man, and the joker raising his voice still more cried out once again:

"For the third and last time of asking, I order you, dead weaver, to arise good and proper and return to wield the shuttle which is the means of livelihood of your family."

The disobedient corpse did not stir; whereupon the rogue said:

"Pass on, gentlemen, and proceed with the funeral, for I give you my word that the same thing has happened to me twice with two dead men at Toledo and Ocana, and neither of them would be resuscitated. And pardon me for having detained you."

Having said this he took to his heels, followed by the enraged populace. He took refuge in a monastery and having told the monks what had happened they were so much amused that they helped him to get safely away.

This story is told by Tirso de Molina in a tedious book called *Las Cigarras de Toledo*.

But, for all this brutality, the Spaniards in their mutual inter-

course preserved the forms of scrupulous politeness. Ceremonial phrases were part and parcel of ordinary conversation. It was no more than civil to say "I kiss your worship's hands," or "I put myself at your worship's feet." The Habsburg dynasty had brought with it a passion for titles and their possessors addressed one another by them with great punctiliousness. Common and gentle alike set great store on purity of descent, and well they might since a trace of Jewish or Moorish blood brought with it all manner of disabilities. They were enraptured with their own nobility and both men and women seldom told you the story of their lives (an inveterate habit of theirs) without stating from what eminent families they issued. In one play, Lope's *El Premio del Bien Hablar*, the heroine, knowing that her suitor wants something to read, sends him her family tree to show him that her lineage is no less exalted than his. Lope, whose father was an embroiderer, claimed descent from a noble family of Asturias, and even the wise Cervantes, the son of a surgeon-barber who wandered from town to town cupping and blistering his patients, laid claim without justification to the distinguished name of Saavedra. In passing I may mention an incident that I came across in a life of Solorzano, a voluminous writer of picaresque stories. He was for some time secretary to the Conde de Benavente, a famous Viceroy of Naples, and the King desiring to reward his services at no expense to himself granted him a title with the right to sell it. He disposed of it, doubtless at a good price, to a certain Vicencio Antoniani, a native of Gaeta. It has occurred to me that this is a practice that might very well be followed at the present day: the needy servant of the State might thus be spared financial anxiety in his old age at no cost to the tax-payer and many a prosperous merchant or lucky broker might honourably join the ranks of the aristocracy.

I have already mentioned the fact that love was an affection that seized upon its victims at first sight. In men and women equally (at least in plays and novels) a glance, a comely shape seen in passing, could excite a paroxysm of passion. So ardent was it that even early in the morning, and the dawn was the signal for them to rise, its power engrossed them. I think I am not wrong in saying that in our day, on the other hand, the passion misnamed tender has a very small hold on the lover till the first cocktail has brought its solace and its violence can be held within the bounds of common sense till after business hours. In Spain they loved twenty-four hours a day. They were a race who spoke naturally

in an exaggerated fashion, and when we would say, "What a bore," they would cry, "Is there in the whole world a more unhappy man than I?" I have already related in what terms the rude soldier Miguel de Castro referred to his beloved. The Spanish lover snatched down the moon from heaven to lay at his lady's feet; the sun was dragged in by his flaming hair; he ransacked classical mythology to prove the extravagance of his desire and the animal and vegetable kingdoms only just sufficed to provide him with metaphors. It was a love the aim of which was marriage, especially when the lady's birth and fortune were of a satisfactory nature, but whether this was due to the censorship of the Inquisition or the Sprniard's innate desire for domesticity I do not know.

But the love that enflamed these hot-blooded people, notwithstanding their romantic professions, was very honestly, without pretences on one side or the other, rooted in sexual desire. Marriage was but the necessary prelude to the nuptial couch. But men being what they were and women healthily eager to share their pleasure, the marriage ceremony was often anticipated and then it was difficult to induce the gallant to fulfil his promises. On the Spanish stage there is a long procession of high-born ladies mourning their lost honour and through three acts pursuing the faithless lover with entreaties or threats of vengeance. The stage rings with their appeals for justice. They do not attempt to conceal their shame, but lament it vociferously in every kind of metrical form. It must be admitted that when the unwilling swain is obliged, willy-nilly, to redeem his pledge he does so with a good grace and the spectator is left with the consoling assurance that the couple will live happily ever after.

Considering their obstinate persuasion that in their virginity they possess a pearl of great price, the female characters of the Spanish drama are astonishingly careless about it. The dangers that attend its loss are constantly before their eyes. Not only may the ravisher leave them in the lurch, but their fathers and brothers may think that only their death can cleanse the blot on their escutcheon. In *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, when Isabel has been abducted by soldiers and ravished by their captain, her brother, though but a peasant's son, is only prevented from plunging his dagger in her heart by the opportune appearance of their father. She, poor thing, though in no way to blame, looks upon death as no more than her due. When she finds her father tied to a tree she will not unloose him, convinced that he will kill her before

she has said her say, till in melodious numbers she has given him a circumstantial account of the outrage that has been inflicted on her. Her father however decides that it will do if she enters a convent. As the bride of Jesus Christ, he remarks with brutal common sense, she chooses a husband who is not fussy over quality. But notwithstanding these hazards the feckless creatures continue to exhibit an extreme want of prudence. They are more negligent of that article of virtue, their maidenhead, than ever an actress of our day of a heavily insured string of pearls.

In this connection it is instructive to examine a play called *El Burlador de Sevilla* which has made some stir in the world. It is by Gabriel Tellez, a Mercenarian monk who wrote under the name of Tirso de Molina; and I may remark in passing that he managed the affairs of his order and performed his religious duties in an exemplary manner. It must be one of the worst plays that was ever written. The Spanish dramatists, perhaps rightly, never bothered themselves much with rules, but few plays can ever have run their course in so happy-go-lucky a fashion as does this one. It is monstrously incoherent. Scenes follow one another with no proper sequence. Probability is flouted. Peasants indulge in conceits that would have surprised even the cultured Euphuës. None of the persons behaves with elementary common sense. The characters are conventional. Nowadays when a play is badly constructed, when its people act without rhyme or reason, and loose ends are left lying about all over the place, we sit up and say it has atmosphere. I suppose one might say of *El Burlador de Sevilla* that it had the same vague quality. It has certainly a strange, sinister life. One cannot, however, read it without being astonished that such a clumsy piece of work should have had such a remarkable destiny. Innumerable versions have been made of it. It has inspired poets and painters, sculptors and composers. For it is in this play that Don Juan first made his bow before a world that has never since been tired of gazing at him. It proves, I suppose, that you may write as badly as you like, and do your job as ill as it can be done, if you chance to create a type he will go marching down the ages to the end of time. You gave him life and he holds you for ever in the remembrance of men. It is the best fortune that can ever happen to an author.

Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Don Juan Tenorio are all three immortal.

It is curious to compare the Don Juan of this play with the Don

Juan that posterity has little by little constructed. But first of all let it be noted that the episode of the statue coming to supper has been a great stumbling-block. Authors in fact have found him (or it) the very devil to deal with. After his entrance, which cannot fail to be dramatic, they have none of them quite known what to do with him. Tirso de Molina made a greater hash of it than any of his successors. The statue comes to supper with Don Juan and then Don Juan goes to supper with him. By making two scenes when only one was necessary the dramatist has lamentably weakened his effect. But it was this incident that gave him the idea for his play and through its course he was bound to work up to it. He invented the character of Don Juan to fit it. Tirso de Molina is not the only playwright whose imagination has been excited by a dramatic incident and when he came to write his play found that the character he had devised to act it made the incident nonsensical. Don Juan lives in despite of the paltry intrigue and the grotesque catastrophe. Later generations have represented him as a great lover, passionate but inconstant, and it was inevitable that some should have seen in his unsatisfied desire an allegory of life. Others have looked upon his fickleness as a symbol of man's restless seeking for the ideal. Some have thought that he passed from one earthly love to another in desperate pursuit of that heavenly love of which Plato wrote. But Tirso called his play *El Burlador de Sevilla*, *The Joker of Seville*. His Don Juan is not a great lover, he is a great fornicator. But his pleasure lies not only in the gratification of his lust, but in the joke of it; half the fun consists in the deceit he has practised. He gets women by stratagem, by promises he has no intention of fulfilling, by making much of his condition, and when he has had his way with them is tickled to death because he has fooled them. It is a jest of the same nature as pulling away a chair when somebody is just going to sit on it. Prudence and courage are strangely mingled in him. He will hazard his life to save his servant from drowning, but he prepares his get-away at the same time as he makes arrangements to seduce his victim. He can afford to be bold since he takes no risks; his father is chief justice and the king's favourite. He is a staunch Catholic, and though he turns a sarcastic ear to such as threaten him with the vengeance of heaven, he fully intends to make his peace with God in good time. He is incapable of gratitude and insensitive to others' pain. He is gallant, witty, and courteous. The type lives on; Don Juan is the ancestor of the raffish young noble-

man of our own day, with the manners of a gentleman and the instincts of a Borstal boy, who makes his friends of prize-fighters, jockeys, and bar-loungers. Good-natured and unscrupulous, he is described by the people who like him as his own worst enemy. A frightful bounder. Women, though he treats them like kitchen-maids, adore him. They fall for him with such indecent alacrity that he himself is often embarrassed. Strange creatures! Gangsters and crooks will tell you that what makes their trade so hard is neither the vigilance of the police nor the untrustworthiness of their confederates but the importunity of the sex.

And indeed the behaviour of the women in *El Burlador de Sevilla* is so imprudent, their folly so inane, that it almost serves to disculpate the ruffian. The Duchess Isabella, a maiden, admits into her room at night a man who knocks at the door and hops into bed with her, under the impression that it is her suitor. She is very much surprised, when a light is brought, to discover that she has lost her virginity to a total stranger. Tisbea is a fisher-girl, and when Don Juan has just escaped drowning she gives him shelter in her hut. He has but to promise marriage for her immediately to succumb to his advances. Doña Ana loves and is beloved of the Marques de la Mota, Don Juan's dearest friend. She has made an appointment with him, whereupon Don Juan, getting rid of him by a trick, takes his place and ravishes her. Aminta, a pretty peasant, is being married to Batricio when Don Juan casts his eye on her. He tells Batricio that he has already slept with her, whereupon the bridegroom's honour forces him to leave her. Don Juan makes his way into the wedding-chamber and after telling her what a grand fellow he is (and of course promising marriage) seduces her. It may be that the maidenhead of these women, duchess or peasant, is their most priceless possession; they are all in a confounded hurry to be rid of it. Not thus behaved the heroine of the novel *La Pícarra Justina*. She knew very well the worth of her virtue and with wiles and her quick wit foiled the attempts of the men, students, barbers, pious hermits, and sanctimonious sacristans, who sought to debauch her; she plundered them all and gave nothing in return, so that when at last she married she was able to say with pride that her virginity would honourably prove itself by enamelling with ruby floods the silvery white of the nuptial sheets. Messy, but convincing!

But there are people so perverse as to declare that novels and plays do not always give a trustworthy picture of the manners and

customs of the day. There is no reason to suppose that the family of the divine Cervantes was very different from any other family in the middle class to which he belonged. There is much in its recorded behaviour that must give pain to the moral sense of our enlightened age. His Aunt Maria became the mistress of an arch-deacon, and her father, a stern and upright judge, did not hesitate to invoke the majesty of the law when the reverend gentleman fought shy of paying the stipulated sum to compensate her for the loss of her virtue. The author had two sisters, Magdalena and Andrea, and both supplemented their meagre earnings as sempstresses by the pleasant and more lucrative exercise of prostitution. He would have been released from captivity in Algiers much sooner than he was if Don Alfonso Pacheco de Portocarrera, notwithstanding his illustrious name, had not bilked Magdalena of five hundred ducats. Don Alfonso seems to have been a bad payer. He agreed to pay Andrea five hundred ducats ("for the great obligation to you that I am under"), but the most assiduous research has failed to show that he did so. It looks as though a disinclination to pay for services rendered was a family trait, for Andrea was obliged to bring an action against his brother for money and jewels that he had promised her. Fortunately for all parties she had other admirers who were more generous: an Italian, Juan Francisco Locadelo, had on one occasion given her a certain sum in cash, wearing apparel, and a quantity of household furniture. Part of this, five rolls of taffeta, when money was short Cervantes afterwards pawned for thirty ducats.

Shortly before his marriage to Catalina de Salazar, Cervantes had a daughter by an actress called Ana Franca. She was known as Isabel de Saavedra. Her mother dying when she was fourteen or fifteen, her Aunt Magdalena engaged her as a maid-servant. She does not appear to have remained a maid very long and so naturally ceased to be a servant; she then assumed her rightful station as a daughter of the house. This was only proper since, her aunts being long past their prime, it seems to have devolved on her (with Cervantes earning so little by his pen) to keep the home fires burning. For soon after the triumphant publication of *Don Quixote* a very unfortunate accident befell its author. A rake named Gaspar de Espileta was mortally wounded at the door of his house. He was brought in to die. The *Alcalde* who undertook the investigation learned that the behaviour of the ladies of the house had given rise to scandal and, thinking that they knew more of the murder

than they chose to say, arrested Cervantes, his sister Andrea, and her bastard daughter Constanza, his own daughter Isabel and certain other women who lived there. He arrested also a wealthy Portuguese, Simon Mendez by name, who was commonly supposed to be Isabel's lover. There was no evidence to show that any of them were connected with the crime, but the four *Alcaldes* sitting in judgment forbade Simon Mendez to have any further communication with Isabel de Saavedra, and the women, though released from gaol, were placed under arrest in their house. Some time afterwards Isabel de Saavedra was living by herself (*dans ses meubles*) under the protection of a married man of mature age called Juan de Urbina, and it was he who paid her dowry when (with a baby of eight months old) she settled down to married life with a certain Luis de Molina.

Such were the domestic relations of a very distinguished man of letters in the Golden Age of Spanish literature.

All this has caused the biographers of Cervantes much uneasiness and they have exercised a great deal of ingenuity to conceal the fact that he was poor and saw no disgrace in profiting, when occasion called, by the frailty of his sisters first and then of his daughter. It is unreasonable to judge a man of one age by the standards of another. A popular author nowadays would think it discreditable to live on the prostitution of his female relations (he would not need to) but he would not hesitate to praise a critic's book in order to get a favourable criticism of his own. Morally there is nothing to choose between one action and the other. Perhaps no one that we know of was more tolerant than Cervantes; but tolerance is not an umbrella that you take when you think it will rain and leave at home when it looks fine; tolerance is a staff that you carry with you always as a support in all the circumstances of life. There is no reason why Cervantes should not have looked upon his own conduct with the same indulgence as he looked upon other people's. We may do the same. From the behaviour of most people you would judge that tolerance is called for only in matters that you care nothing about: on the contrary it is called for in matters about which you care a great deal. It is not the least of the victories that man may win over his ruthless egoism. The biographers of Cervantes have tried to make a saint of him. Folly! An artist needs no whitewashing. You must take him as he is and it is impertinent to deny his failings: without them he would not be the man, and so the artist, that he is. A writer con-

structs characters by observation, but he only gives them life if they are himself. The more persons he is the more characters he creates. Cervantes was not only the noble Don Quixote, he was the astute and faithful Sancho, the rascally Ginés de Pasamonte, the barber, the curate, the joking Sansón Carrasco as well. The artist, like the mystic who tries to attain God, is detached in spirit from the world. He has by his nature the freedom which the mystic seeks in the repression of desire. He stands aloof. The artist's right and wrong are not the right and wrong of plain men. Plain men may condemn him if they choose; he shrugs his shoulders and gravely goes his own way. But the plain men were wise to hesitate. There is a great deal of hypocrisy in our judgment of others. We make an ideal picture of ourselves and measure our fellows by it. But when we read the Diary of Pepys or the Confessions of Rousseau, in which a little of the truth is told, when we study the life of Wagner, we are horrified: we forget; we will not look at our private selves. I do not believe that there is any man who, if the whole truth were known of him, would not seem a monster of depravity; and also I believe that there are very few who have not at the same time virtue, goodness, and beauty. Cervantes did not hesitate to profit by the looseness of his sisters. He got into so much trouble in the business affairs in which he was from time to time engaged that it is hard to be quite certain of his honesty. He was courageous. He was long-suffering. He was gallant. He was magnanimous.

It is perhaps not surprising that respectable travellers were shocked at the moral laxity of the Spanish. Van Aarssens, Heer van Sommerledijk, was a gentleman of substance who visited Spain during the reign of Philip IV. "Besides the great numbers of loose women that are to be found up and down Madrid," he writes, "there are others in certain fixed quarters, countenanced by Publick Authority, for the accommodation of any that will go to them. . . . They have a salary from the Town, for which cause so infamous an employment is sought after, and when one of the Jades dies or is disabled by the Pox, the magistrates are solicited for the vacancy . . . sinning thus with impunity and toleration of the Publick Authority, they seldom forsake the vice they so openly profess, though one day in the year is devoted to exhort them to repentance. On a Friday in Lent, they are by an *alguazil* or two conducted to the Church of Penitents, and there seated near the pulpit, where the preacher does his best to touch their hearts, but

seldom with success; after vain exhortations to amend their lives, descending from his pulpit, he presents them the Crucifix, saying Behold the Lord, embrace him; which if any does, she is immediately taken away, and shut up in the Cloister of Penitents; but usually they only hang down their heads and shed a few tears without laying hold of what is offered, and after their grimaces continue their deboshed life; neither can the story of St. Mary Magdalen, so often inculcated to them, move them to imitation of her."

I can with difficulty believe that the Government extended its paternalism so far as to give these women a living wage, but there is no doubt that it set apart quarters in which they were settled. When they emerged from them, which on various pretexts they often did, they were ordered by royal decree to wear yellow head-shawls so that they should not be taken for honest women. But—and this is an interesting point in feminine psychology—honest women to the indignation of the rightful wearers took to wearing head-shawls of the same colour. In order to combat the unfair competition from amateurs which thus resulted, the lawful members of the ancient profession, flouting the law, abandoned their yellow head-shawls in favour of black ones; but I have not been able to ascertain whether it had the desired effect. I doubt it.

I owe to the erudition of Don Francisco Marin the knowledge of some facts which throw a curious light on the standards of the day. It appears that on the fourth of November 1468 King Ferdinand the Catholic by royal decree, signed only by himself and not by Queen Isabella; because the affair was slightly scabrous, granted to Don Alfonso Yañez Faxardo for the services he had rendered in the wars against the Moors in irrevocable gift to himself, his heirs and successors in perpetuity the possession of all the quarters and houses in which dwelt women of the town in those places which he had conquered from the Moorish enemies of the Holy Catholic Faith. Don Alfonso was empowered to seize all brothels in the Kingdom of Granada and other persons were strictly forbidden to keep them. He was entitled to let the houses for rent and exact the customary tribute. This favour was confirmed to the heirs of Don Alfonso by later monarchs and they continued to enjoy its emoluments if not in perpetuity, at least for several generations.

Of course neither Don Alfonso nor his heirs could conduct their lucrative business in person. In course of time the property was divided up. A spendthrift nobleman was obliged to sell part of his

heritage, a daughter had to be dowered, a Minister of State had to be bribed, with the result that individuals came into possession of a lot of a dozen or twenty houses. The owner of such a lot would choose a trustworthy person to see that the establishment was properly conducted. He was known as "the father". It was an honourable office, much sought after, and a profitable one. The "father's" nomination had to be approved by the city and, this having been done, he took an oath before the clerk of the council to adhere to the regulations. These stipulated that he should not charge more than a real a day for a room, a stipulation which he ignored, and should provide a bed, two mattresses, a pillow and a sheet, a chair, a mat to put on the floor, and a light. A real was equivalent to the English sixpence, but of course was worth ten times, or more, what it is worth now. Young and beautiful women could earn as much as four or five ducats a day, but old and ugly ones earned only a few pence. The "father", though it was strictly forbidden, hired his clients clothes and when they were short of cash lent them money at usurious rates on whatever belongings they had or on their prospective earnings. Altogether these honourable persons made a very good thing out of their position.

In course of time, however, the women found it more to their advantage to leave the quarters allotted to them and establish themselves in various parts of the town. This they were allowed to do on solemnly declaring that they intended to abandon their harlotry and lead a decent life. The outcome was that the brothels ceased to be a paying proposition. The "fathers" made an official protest to the city council—not, as you might have imagined, because it took the bread out of their mouths, but in the name of public morality. They called the council's attention to the fact that "with these wicked women allowed to wander about the streets", for of course they had never had any notion of changing their mode of life, and solicit men to come into their houses in order "to mingle with them carnally" there arose disadvantages which their workshops could imagine. They demanded that prostitutes should either be driven out of the city or ordered to return to the brothels. The city elders gravely considered the matter, but it was settled for them by the edict of 1623 which abolished houses of ill fame throughout the kingdom. Thus many respected citizens lost their means of livelihood, and the heirs and successors of Don Alfonso must have asked themselves bitterly what it availed them to have an ancestor who had so greatly distinguished himself in

the Moorish wars. I do not know whether "in this antick of remarques which I have daubed with so many colours", to quote again my good Dutchman, the reader will have been as much surprised as I have been at the picture of the Spaniards of the Golden Age that presents itself. For my part I must admit that it does not in the least fit in with my preconceptions. These are not the dignified, taciturn, and punctilious creatures that most of us imagine those *hidalgos* to have been. So great is the difference between them and the gay, loose, and sportive folk who display themselves in the literature of the day that one is bewildered. Certainly when one looks at the long series of El Greco's portraits in the Prado it is hard to believe that his sitters were the same people as those who took their part in Tirso de Molina's *Cigarrales de Toledo* from which I took the little story of the practical joker and the dead weaver. One cannot see those wan and melancholy gentlemen dressing up in fantastic garb and playing the fool. Van Aarsens says that in public Spaniards seemed very grave, serious, and reserved, "but in private, and to those that are familiarly acquainted with them, they act in a manner so different, you would not take them for the same persons." That is interesting. It looks as though it were a mask they assumed. Why should they have done so? The House of Austria looked upon gravity as an essential part of majesty, and the same traveller tells us that one day the Queen, laughing at dinner at the quips and antics of a buffoon, was put in mind that to do so ill became a Queen of Spain. The King, as we know, was trained to show his feelings neither by his manner nor by his expression. His lips and tongue moved when he spoke, but no gesture was permitted him and his countenance suffered no change. It is possible that this impressive solemnity was imitated by such as were in contact with the court and so grew to be a mark of gentility. Then in Italy and the Low Countries the Spanish lived among a hostile population quicker-witted than themselves: stupid people in authority very naturally assume a dignified manner as a defence against a cleverness they do not understand. It may have been very useful to them in their relations with these subject races. But even in their own country they have always been suspicious of foreigners. They have kept them at a distance by haughtiness and ceremony. It is natural enough that these characteristics should have impressed strangers, and when writers came to portray the Spanish in plays and novels it was only to be expected that they should seize upon them as typical. And

a type once determined dies hard. Who on the English stage to-day would believe in a Frenchman who did not gesticulate or a mathematician who was not absent-minded? The Spaniard whom the writers, starting with Corneille, depicted, unsmiling, proud, jealous and passionate, obsessed with his honour, had an obvious dramatic value; and it is not strange that the authors of the romantic era should have accepted him without demur, for he precisely fitted their demand for the melodramatic picturesque.

But these are merely guesses and the reader can take them or leave them.

IX

ONE of the things that attracted me to the subject I had chosen was the possibility of writing about El Greco. He was fond, as we know, of painting good-looking young men and I intended to have my hero sit to him. This would give me an opportunity, I thought, of drawing a portrait of that strange man as I saw him.

Painters, not unnaturally, since so much nonsense has been written on the subject, have always resented writers expressing their opinions on pictures. They have insisted, often with great vehemence, that only the painter can speak of painting with authority, and that the man of letters, looking at a picture from his literary point of view, can know nothing of its specific value. His part is to admire in silence and, if he has the money, buy. This seems to me a narrow way of thinking. Doubtless they are right when they claim that only painters should discuss technique, but technique is not the whole of painting. You might as well say that only a dramatist can appreciate a play. The drama also has its technique, though it is not so abstruse as some of its professors like to pretend, but it is the business only of the dramatist. To understand the technique of an art may be a diversion, it may even give the layman the feeling, agreeable to some people, of being in the know (like addressing the head-waiter of a fashionable restaurant by his first name), but it is not essential to appreciation. It may greatly interfere with it. We know that painters are often very bad judges of pictures, for their interest in technique absorbs them so that they cannot recognise merits, unconnected with it, that may give a picture value. For technique is only the method by which the artist achieves his aim. It is no more than the

knowledge that has gradually been acquired of the best ways to attain the specific excellences of which a medium is capable. It cannot touch the heart nor excite the mind. An inadequate technique will not prevent the artist from doing this. I do not think people are sufficiently conscious of the great difference there is between the attitude of the artist towards the work he creates and the attitude of the beholder. The connection between them is slight. For the moment I will leave on one side the position of the artist and consider the work of art in relation with the beholder.

But first I should like to deal with the meaning of a word. To the term artist is now attached a judgment of value, and (though painters are not so squeamish) most of us who practise an art are as shy of calling ourselves artists as we are of calling ourselves gentlemen. In this sense the term is the sport of fashion. A painter may be at one period considered an artist and at another a charlatan. What makes it more confusing is that it does not always correspond with pre-eminence. I suppose few people would deny that Addison was a greater artist than Charles Dickens, but few could doubt which was the greater writer. The word craftsman has unfortunate associations, nor does it indicate the act of creation, which is the essence of the matter; and the word creator is intolerably pretentious. I do not know any word that will do but artist; I must use it, but I mean by it only someone who is engaged in the arts. He may be a good artist or a bad one.

I have long since abjured the heresy prevalent in my youth of art for art's sake. Oscar Wilde popularised it in England and Oscar Wilde learnt it from Whistler. It gave art an esoteric quality that flattered the artist and it was accepted by the cultured public with the humility that characterises them. The cultured public have always taken a masochistic pleasure in the contempt that artists have shown them and, browbeaten and intimidated, have comforted themselves with a feeling of superiority over the common herd. It was believed that the object of a work of art was to arouse the æsthetic emotion and, when you had felt that, you had got all it had to give you. But what is an emotion that results in nothing? To experience the æsthetic emotion is pleasurable and all pleasure is good; but it is pleasurable also to drink a glass of beer and no one has ever been able to show that, taken simply as pleasure, one surpasses the other. Attempts have been

made by moralists to prove that spiritual pleasures are keener and more lasting than sensual pleasures; they carry no conviction. No pleasure endures and, to please, it must be taken in small doses and at not too infrequent intervals. It would be no less tedious to hear Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* every day than it would be to eat caviare. And until age has blunted the sensibilities the general experience is surely that the pleasures of sense are more vivid than the pleasures of the spirit. We have all known omnivorous readers who read for the delight of it; they absorb books as the machines in Chicago absorb hogs, but no sausages come out of them at the other end; and we have all known the people who moon their days away in picture galleries in imbecile contemplation; they are no better than opium smokers, worse if anything, for the opium smoker at all events is not self-complacent. The value of emotion lies in its effects. Santa Teresa insisted on this over and over again: the ecstasy of union with the Godhead was precious only if it resulted in greater capacity for works. The æsthetic emotion, however delightful and however subtle, has worth only if it leads to action.

The work of art, whether the artist intended it or not, and for my part I think he seldom does, proffers a communication. This has nothing to do with the artist. From his standpoint it may only be a by-product of his activity: so the esculent swallows build nests to rear their young and are unaware that for their aphrodisiac qualities they will go to make soup for the enfeebled but amative Chinese. This communication is made in two voices. For the work of art is a diversion, an escape from the bitterness of life and a solace in the world's inevitable cruelty, a rest from its turmoil and a relief from labour. This is much, and if a work of art has only this communication to make, it justifies itself. But great works speak with another voice too; they enrich the soul so that it is capable of a nobler and more fruitful activity. Their effects are worthy deeds. But should you ask me what these are I must confess that I should find it hard to reply. Provisionally at all events I should be willing enough to accept the maxim of Fray Luis de Leon: "The beauty of life," he says, "is nothing but this, that each should act in conformity with his nature and his business."

Notwithstanding this long preamble I do not wish to say much of El Greco's pictures. Nothing is so tedious as a description of the greens, yellows, and blues that are in a picture; you cannot

visualise them even with a photograph before you and the narrator's enthusiasm does not matter to you a row of pins. It is enough to say that El Greco's cool, silvery colours are lovely. When the art critics begin to talk of upper triangles and lower triangles, as they do with the *Burial of Count Orgaz*, or of inner and outer ellipses in the *San Maurizio*, I sigh. Do they really think that an artist bothers his head with such things? You look at a picture as a whole, that is one of the advantages the plastic arts have over the descriptive, and it is as a whole that it must affect you. The study of its parts is merely amusement. An emotion analysed is no longer an emotion. I do not suppose the painter creates a work of art differently from any other artist. The artist works by instinct combined with knowledge and his knowledge he acquires partly from his predecessors and partly from his own errors. I have had the greatest admiration for El Greco and if now my admiration is a trifle qualified that is perhaps because I have got out of him all that I am capable of getting. For my own part I find that when a work of art has given me a powerful emotion I cannot recapture it any more than I can eat a dinner I have already eaten. In this I am very unlike a cow. One gets tired of everything. But what remains is the personality behind the work of art; that to some minds is the great interest in the artist's work; and that, so complex is man, is an interest that endures when you know his work by heart.

It is with the personality, then, of the Greek that I am concerned. There is only one word that I know to describe it and that is one we are told to eschew. The late, but excellent, Fowler tells us that there is no excuse for the use of the word intriguing. He asks plaintively why we should not say interesting or perplexing, but really they do not mean quite the same thing, and if ever the word is justified it is here. To me it suggests an ambiguity, a puzzle that invites you to solve it and a secret that demands all your subtlety to discover it. It is all very well to tell us that it is formed from the word intrigue; the adjective has by now acquired a meaning of its own. I would say boldly, then, that no great artist is more intriguing than El Greco. I have wondered whether from the little that is known of his life, from some acquaintance with the circumstances in which he lived and from his strange and beautiful paintings, it was possible to get a coherent idea of the person he was. This indeed was essential if I was in my pages to draw the portrait of a living man. I thought also that I might thus explain, at least to my

own satisfaction, something of the mysteriousness of his pictures.

Of his life very little is known and that little is unexpected. Until recently he was thought to have been born about 1545, or even later, for there is a letter dated 1570 from Julio Clovio recommending him to the attention of Cardinal Farnese in which he is described as a youth; but lately an erudite Spaniard, Don Francisco San Roman, has proved that he was born in 1541. It seems strange that Julio Clovio should have called him a youth when he was hard on thirty; at that time, and indeed much later, that age was looked upon as the flower of manhood and youth already passed; but it agrees well enough with the statement made by Jusepe Martinez that he died at an advanced age. It is known that he died in 1614. The explanation may be that Julio Clovio thought thus to excite the sympathy of a possible patron and it may be that, being himself seventy-three, he looked upon a man of thirty as no more than a boy. In his letter he describes him further as a pupil of Titian, and this is at first sight surprising, since the works by which we chiefly know him show the influence of Tintoretto rather than of Titian. But it appears that El Greco's early pictures owe much to him, and the wily Julio Clovio may well have thought it more useful to describe the young man as the pupil of the better-known master. He was born in Crete. Of his boyhood nothing is known, but it is supposed that he learnt to paint in the monastery schools, in which the manufacture of icons had long been a flourishing industry. He went to Venice, but at what age is uncertain, and after a lengthy sojourn there settled down in Rome. Here he seems to have passed five or six years, and some time between 1575 and 1577, being then about thirty-five, he went to Spain. He stayed there for the rest of his life. The common view is that in Toledo he recognised his spiritual home. It is held that he acquired his magic colour from the grey walls of that city built upon a rock and from the austere tones of the surrounding country; in his encounter with the Spanish character it is held that he developed an originality that his early works had given small hint of, and in his contact with the passionate Spanish faith achieved the mystical exaltation that inspires his great religious pictures. He has been seen as a man of an austere temper, indifferent to the things of the earth, who went his lonely ascetic way intent only on expressing his rapt vision; and those later pictures of his with their fantastic distortions seemed the final effort to represent a spiritual experience.

This is plausible, romantic enough to please the fancy, and coherent. But it is only credible if you leave out everything that is known of El Greco and that can be seen in his pictures that does not fit in with it. Those cool colours of his were there before ever he went to Spain; it may be that they were the colours he learnt in the Cretan monastery in which he had been taught to paint icons, or it may be that he discovered them in his own sensibility. There is no reason to believe that they would have been different if he had never left Italy. It is singular to find in the portrait of Julio Clovio, painted before his journey to Spain, a landscape with the same tortured sky that he painted so often in his later pictures. It is a sky that in point of fact you do not see in Toledo nearly so often as you do in Venice, and indeed you will find it in several of Tintoretto's pictures in the *Scuola di San Rocco*. In the *Madonna del Orto* you will find the heavy grey clouds, with their abrupt outlines, looking as though they were cut out of tufa, that are so characteristic of El Greco.

There is no knowing why he went to Spain. It may be of course that he went because he hoped to get work. Artists were being engaged to decorate the Escorial and a painter who could find little to do at home might well think it worth his while to try his luck abroad. So English actors who cannot get a job in London go to New York and often achieve a success that their own country denied them. A certain Mancini, a contemporary, states that he left Rome because the painters and patrons of the arts resented a remark he had made about Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. The Pope, considering certain figures indecent, desired to have them painted over, whereupon El Greco said that if he would destroy the whole work he would do another, "not a whit worse than Michelangelo's as a work of art, which would be both chaste and decorous in addition." Painters must have changed very much since then if they took so much to heart a fellow painter's criticism of a dead painter, and patrons of the arts had much to learn if they attached great importance to what one artist said of another. I can see nothing in El Greco's character to persuade me that any indignation a flout of his might arouse would have driven him from a place he did not want to leave. In a dispute between El Greco and the chapter of Toledo over his picture *El Espolio*, when asked during the legal proceedings that took place why he had come to Spain, he refused to answer. Considering that he was a foreigner, living among people who did not like foreigners, and at logger-

heads with the Church, which few were inclined to affront, it seems strange that he should have declined to give his reason without good cause. It looks very much as though he had something to hide. When you read the novels and biographies of the day it occurs to you how often a journey was occasioned by the tragic outcome of a quarrel. Swords were drawn quickly, often on trivial grounds, and if you were unlucky enough to kill your antagonist it was usual to go while the going was good. I have wondered whether research in the police records of Rome, if such still exist, would not reward the industrious investigator with the explanation why El Greco went to Spain and stayed there. At the same trial he stated that he did not understand Spanish very well. This does not seem to have been questioned. He had then been in Toledo for three or four years. El Greco had provided himself with a sleeping dictionary; which our empire-builders recommend as the best way to acquire the speech of the country they inhabit and so make themselves more competent to bear the white man's burden. He took a mistress, Doña Jeronima de las Cubas, and in 1578, it is supposed, had a son by her. Levantines are quick at learning languages. El Greco's indifference to acquiring Spanish does not look as though he were very much interested in the country which was to be his home for the rest of his life. He never lost his pride in his Greek birth. As is well known, he signed his pictures with his full name in Greek characters and added the fact that he was a Cretan. A list of the books in his possession at his death has been found. There were about two hundred of them. Of these only seventeen were in Spanish; but unfortunately their titles are not given. The rest were in Italian or Greek. It is hard to resist the conclusion that his curiosity about Spanish literature was not intense.

Toledo, when El Greco settled there, was no longer the capital of Spain, but it was still the centre of much artistic and literary activity. Churches were being built that had to be decorated. Ecclesiastics lived splendidly. Poets and dramatists made lengthy sojourns. The painter might very well have known Lope de Vega and Cervantes; he certainly knew Gongora, the obscure, irascible, and conceptist poet. Plays were given by professional actors and by aristocratic amateurs, and every possible occasion was seized upon, the birth of a royal prince, the signing of a peace, for splendid festivities. An attractive picture of the life of the place is given in *Las Cigarras de Toledo*, to which I have already referred. It is a

dull book, it must be confessed, and the euphuistic style in which it is written is tedious. The time of day is told you with such witty conceits that to discover what it is you need not only some acquaintance with astronomy but also with mythology. When you are told that a curtain is indebted to the labours of architectural worms it is easy to guess that it is made of silk, but you have to think a moment before you discover that when the author informs you that snow, transformed into wax by the parturition of the republican but tiny birds, was burning, he means that the candles were lit. To our modern taste it seems a roundabout way of saying that you threw a letter into the fire unopened, to state that only the flames were given leave to unseal it. But, for all that, you get an impression of leisured, courtly, well-bred persons who took delight in beautiful things. They passed the summer mornings in the pleasures of the chase and fishing (the fish biting with avidity because the bait was offered them by such fair hands); the afternoons in peaceful games, tilting, and racing; and the nights in dancing, delectable argument, and ingenious devising.

The reader may think that this picture does not correspond very well with what I have said before about the poverty that so constantly oppressed the Spaniards of the Golden Age. Let him go to the Mall on the evening of a Court and look at the long line of cars driving up in which sit dowagers in their diamonds and débutantes in grand new dresses. They tell me that the scene within the Palace is gorgeous beyond description. Then let him stroll along to the Admiralty Arch. He will find a coffee-stall where the hungry are given for nothing a cup of tea and a bite to eat. There he will see a string of men a quarter of a mile long, patiently waiting, one hour, two hours, for the stall to open. He will admit that there is nothing contradictory in what I have said and indeed that it is just what you would expect.

It has been supposed that El Greco lived in the cultured society of the city, consorting with grave ecclesiastics and eminent lawyers; but the only evidence I know of this is that he painted portraits of such personages. He was a man of education and of a pleasant discourse. Among his Greek books, besides classics such as Homer, Euripides, Plutarch, and Lucian, were the works of certain of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, St. Justin, St. Basil; and it is probable that he could converse suitably with the reverend gentlemen who were his principal patrons. Among his Italian books were Petrarch, Ariosto, and Bernardo Tasso. In his

life, which was described as singular and extravagant, there is nothing to suggest the ascetic. He dwelt in a large house with a display that was thought ostentatious, and he had musicians come from Venice to play to him while he was at dinner. Nothing of this is surprising, for it is an error to suppose that the artist lives in a garret from choice. Philosophers may content themselves with plain living, but painters, writers, and musicians are occupied with the things of sense and, whenever they have been able, have lived with splendour. They have liked grand houses, with as many servants to wait upon them as they could pay for, and they have seldom hesitated to run into debt to provide themselves with fine clothes. El Greco had a keen eye on the profits of his trade. He made a great deal of money. Of the few documents concerning him that have come down to us several have to do with his quarrels over payment with the patrons who had commissioned him to paint a picture. When the authorities taxed him upon the profits of his work at Illescas he fought them and got a judgment in his favour. So far as I can understand the argument, his contention was that what he sold was not canvas and paint, but the art with which he had arranged the paint, and this was not dutiable. Like many another artist before and after him, he was a shrewd business man. He kept in his studio sketches of his pictures so that when the patron came along for an altar-piece he could order what he wanted, a Saint Francis or a Magdalen, an Assumption of the Virgin or Christ bearing the Cross: they were all there, you paid your money and you took your choice. He repeated pictures as often as he was required to. There are two or three versions at least of most of his paintings and of St. Francis in Meditation there are, it appears, over twenty.

There is a peculiar thing about the process of artistic creation which I should not have thought was any different in a painter and a writer. When a writer has been occupied with a subject and has done what he could with it, he is so sick of it that he takes no more interest in it at all. He is like a snake that has sloughed its skin. The subject that has absorbed him ceases to be a part of him; the emotion that filled him when he was working at it is dead and he cannot by any effort of will recapture it. When a writer must take up a theme out of which he has got all he could, making a play out of a novel, to take an example, the labour is mechanical. He cannot expect to have any inspiration. It is a task he performs by exercise of the knowledge he has acquired. I cannot understand

how El Greco could have painted the same pictures over and over again if he was really filled with the religious emotion people find in them. I should have thought he could only do this if the subject was of no consequence to him.

The authorities have dealt with this matter in a very simple way. They have divided El Greco's pictures into good, indifferent, and bad. They claim that he painted the good ones by himself, the indifferent with the help of his assistants, who painted the bad ones all by themselves. It seems to me a little too simple. He must have been a very wonderful artist indeed if he never painted a bad picture. It is strange that Tristan, the best of his pupils, when he worked on his own, painted no pictures so good as the worst of those that are with any probability ascribed to his master. Of course El Greco had assistants who prepared the canvas, squared up the design, and presumably did some underpainting; but the contracts that various religious bodies made with him go into such particular detail, they are so careful to state what they want, you cannot persuade yourself that they would have accepted work which they were not reasonably sure was from his own hand. Indeed when there was a possibility that through death or other hindrance he could not finish a certain work a clause was inserted in the contract that it should be finished by his son Jorge Manuel or by some other specified person. I think some explanation must be sought for the fact that no painter of genius so often repeated his pictures as did El Greco.

Now let us look at the portraits he painted of himself. There is one in the *Burial of Count Orgaz* and another in the *St. Maurizio* in the Escorial. It is not certain that they are his portraits, it is only a tradition that they are, but they are evidently portraits of the same man and it is likely that the tradition is true. Accepting them, then, on the great authority of Don Manuel Cossio, as authentic, I think one may safely say that El Greco may not have looked like this, but this is what he thought he looked like. It is a thin, intelligent face, fresh-coloured, a rather long face; the beard, of a palish, reddish brown, is well trimmed; the hair is dark; the forehead is high and noble; the eyes, somewhat close-set, are cool, observant, and reflective. You have the impression of a man who gave a good deal of thought to his appearance. You would have said from the look of him that this was a composed, intelligently curious man, but one capable neither of great passion nor of deep emotion. In neither of these pictures is there in the

expression any of the seriousness which one would have thought the occasion demanded. This person seems to preserve a strangely ironic detachment; it would never occur to you that he was a mystic; you might have taken him for a sardonic humorist.

Often the portraits that an artist paints will tell you as much about himself as about his sitters, and I have wondered whether El Greco's would not offer some clue to what I sought. Now, when you look at a collection of El Greco's portraits, in the Prado for instance, the first thing that strikes you is their distinction. They have a well-bred elegance. They have gravity and decorum. But it would be absurd to say that they are profound. They seem indeed¹ to be painted in the most perfunctory fashion. The colour is cool and subdued, but no effort is made to use the mass in an effective manner; the bony structure is barely indicated; the heads have no backs to them and the bodies no weight. You get the impression that the Greek was not interested in the people he painted. These men were the contemporaries of the *conquistadores* and of the saints; they are as empty of character as lord mayors. When you compare these portraits with those of Zurbaran, so actual, so strongly individualised, they cease to exist. More than once certainly El Greco painted a magnificent portrait, but only when some eccentricity in the sitter's appearance gave him the obvious opportunity. Now, in fiction it is easy to make a striking character of a person with marked characteristics; the difficulty is to make a man live when he is more or less like everybody else. Any competent novelist could create the father in *The Brothers Karamazov*; he needed to be more than that who created the old servant in *Un Cœur Simple*. I should have thought it was the same in portrait painting. More insight and more imagination were needed, I should have thought, to paint *L'Homme au Gant* than the Grand Inquisitor. It looks as though El Greco regarded his sitters with a singular detachment. Is it possible that this mystic took no interest in the human soul? Though infinitely well-born these people look terribly stupid. They were. The history of Spain during the Golden Age is a history of the abysmal ineptitude of which the human race is capable. A Greek, subtle and quick-witted, a man of culture, it may well be that he was impatient of these fine gentlemen's stupidity.

Years ago I went to Crete, not hoping to find any trace of El Greco, but curious to see the island that had given him birth. From the sea it offers a jagged aspect. It seems to consist of ridge

upon ridge of rough, barren, and stony hills. Their sharp outlines silhouetted against the sky have an austere and unapproachable beauty. Yet when you go into the interior you find that these hills, tawny, arid, and sparsely covered with coarse herbage, separate into pleasing valleys. Here flourish great plantations of ancient olives and in more favourable places vines. Ash trees and cypresses grow along the streams and oleanders luxuriate at their brim. But when you come away it is not so much the memory of the smiling valleys and the shallow rippling streams that you take with you, but rather of the desolate, wild, and tawny hills. When the Greek looked at the gaunt mountain ranges of Castile it must have seemed to him that he was very close to the landscape he had known in childhood.

Candia, outside the main street untidy and bedraggled, is a town of narrow, tortuous streets, with low houses that offer a blank wall to the view; and the unpaved road, all holes, is dusty in dry weather and a morass in wet. You might think yourself back in the sixteenth century. By the side of the grand new Greek church is a little old one, very low, dark, and heavy with stale incense. Its reredos is richly carved and gilt and on the walls hang large icons that you can scarcely see. In the sacristy are others. Some of them are very old and one or two are fine. In several a foreign influence is manifest. In them the Byzantine feeling is swamped, but not entirely destroyed, by the easy splendour and the courtly formality of Venetian art. It is not unreasonable to suppose that it was the exciting charm of this new style that impelled the young painter to make his way to Venice.

No one knows how long the Cretan lived in Italy, ten, twelve, or fifteen years; but they were the impressionable years of his youth and we know the sort of circumstances he was thrown in. Venice had lost much of its political power and the population was declining, but it was the playground of Europe and life, splendid still, was led by the rich with pomp. Manners were easy, scruples were few. The Bride of the Adriatic resisted as well as she could the efforts of the Papacy to reform her morals and to purify her faith. Thought was free and the intelligent were elegantly sceptical. Rome, alarmed by the Reformation, was making some effort to set her house in order, but there is no evidence that the individual was much inconvenienced by the fervour that reigned in high places. Artists have ever proved hostile to the limitations that puritanism has sought to impose on

their private behaviour. From the little that is known of El Greco it seems likely that he would have remained an indifferent spectator of a spiritual movement that his foreign birth made of no great moment to him. Since he died fortified by the rites of the Catholic Church he was presumably received into it, but when you look at his coolly sceptical face you cannot but wonder whether it meant as much to him as those have thought who see in his pictures the most fervent expression of the passion of the Counter-Reformation.

Everyone knows how Philip II commissioned El Greco to paint a picture of St. Maurice and his companions for one of the altars of the Escorial and when it was delivered liked it so little that he would not let it be placed in the church but banished it to a cellar. It hangs now in the Sala Capitular and is the greatest glory of the Escorial. In the eyes of the cultured not one of the actions of his long reign has redounded more to the discredit of Philip II. I think he has been harshly treated. He was a sufficiently enlightened patron of the arts to buy the pictures of Titian and to ask Paul Veronese to come to Spain to decorate the stupendous building on which he lavished such vast treasure. He was a deeply and sincerely religious man. He shared the common (and not unreasonable) opinion of his time that saints should be painted in such a manner that one did not lose the desire to pray before them, nay, that they should engender devotion, "since the chief effect and the end of painting them must be this." El Greco's picture is of superb vivacity, its colouring is so brilliant and original that the neighbouring pictures look dull beside it; but Philip knew a religious picture when he saw one. In the *San Maurizio* the three chief figures wear what I suppose are leather jerkins, but they are in effect nudes; their muscles are drawn as in a studio study and even the navels are shown. The angels that fly about the clouds or in easy attitudes rest upon them, playing musical instruments and singing, seem to take part in a *divertissement* like those prepared by great nobles to honour a royal guest. The figures in the background, the Theban legion, might be stripped for the Olympian Games rather than to attest their faith by martyrdom. It would not be strange if Philip was shocked by the frivolity with which El Greco had treated the scene. The attitude of those various personages is a triumph of elegance. Never did El Greco more obviously paint gestures for their beauty rather than their significance. It is a picture that gives enjoyment; it does not excite devotion.

I cannot but ask myself why El Greco, who could draw so beautifully when he wanted to, should, apart from his deliberate distortions, at times have drawn so carelessly. Why does he put a Virgin's eye half-way down her face or make it pop out of her head as though, poor thing, she had exophthalmic goitre? Why does he sometimes give his saints the look of ducks dying of fright in a thunderstorm? The Virgin in the *Crucifixion* in the Prado is grotesque; that face would not be out of keeping in a satyric painting by Goya. (But how lovely is the colour, the green tunic worn by St. John, the exquisite tone of the body hanging on the cross, so tender and ethereal, and the richness of that tempestuous sky!) I am tempted to ask myself whether when he painted a religious picture he did not give way sometimes to a sardonic humour. It is difficult to see more than a conventional devotion in those single figures of Franciscan saints which, as we know, he painted wholesale. The St. Antony in the Prado is composed so perfunctorily that it does not even make sense. In one hand the saint delicately holds a madonna lily, while with the other he supports a heavy open book on which is a small brown object that he seems to study in pitch-black night; for the background is that stormy sky which El Greco used with amazing pertinacity. And beautiful as I find the *Resurrection* in the Prado, with the slender, soaring, movingly painted figure; exciting as I find the sweep of those others with their arms raised in such expressive gesture; I am not conscious of any depth of religious feeling. Nor is there any that I can see in *The Baptism of Christ*. It is a lovely picture, with colour of an intoxicating beauty; those elongated forms, nude but for their loin-cloths, of the Saviour and the Baptist have an exquisite sophisticated grace; but I feel there no fervour of belief nor rapture of ecstasy. It is disconcerting in that fine picture of Christ bearing the Cross to see the elegance with which the Saviour clasps it. Indeed it is on the hands that El Greco has concentrated the interest. The face, with the eyes showing a great deal of white under the pupil, which was the Cretan's simple way of expressing religious emotion, is the face of a comic actor. Ernest Thesiger might have sat for it. The right hand rests on the cross with the third and fourth fingers together, an old trick of the painter's to get away from the awkwardness of those five odd digits; while the left, again with the third and fourth fingers together, has the little one slightly crooked, as ladies of easy virtue to show their refinement crook their little fingers when they drink a glass of champagne.

Not far from the *San Maurizio* in the Sala Capitular of the Escorial is a picture that portrays religious emotion in a very different manner. It is a *Deposition from the Cross*, and it is by Van der Weyden. Here the emotion is sincere and natural. The expressions are real. The painter felt what he painted and expressed what he felt. You are moved because he was moved himself. It is an awful moment that is represented and there is a sense of despair in the droop of those figures that makes you feel that here is the most terrifying moment in the world's history. The men are stricken with grief, but gravely masters of it; Mary has swooned and there is another woman, Mary Magdalen, I suppose, whose clumsy, broken attitude gives you a tragic impression of hopelessness. All these people feel as they would feel and act as they would act. It is a beautiful picture, a terrible scene, and one to bring home to a rude and brutal people the horror of the event represented. Its sincerity is shattering. You cannot look at it and again believe in El Greco's religious sense.

I do not doubt that he was one of the greatest painters that ever lived. I think *The Burial of Count Orgaz* is one of the greatest pictures in the world. It has a sweep, a freshness, and a vitality that are amazing. It fills you with stupefaction. El Greco was a master of gesture. You would never think that an outflung arm, a raised hand, a foot on tip-toe, or an extended leg could have such a miraculous grace. He had indeed a wonderful sense of the beautiful though limited gestures permitted to the hand. The general effect of a large number of his pictures together, as you may see them in the room in the Prado, is thrilling; it is not only that distinguished, cool yet not cold, colour that moves you, but something in the pictures themselves, apart also from their subjects, their form and architecture. It is something troubling, sinister and enigmatic; I can only suppose it is the personality of the painter. It is like looking into the darkness of a lake in the mountains. You feel vaguely scared. You wonder whether there is anything there at the bottom, a secret that it would be good for you to know, or whether it is an aimless depth that has no purpose. For depth in itself has no greater significance than breadth. The lake may look bottomless only because it is muddy, and if you take a header into it you can easily crack your skull. In literature, I know, the obscure is very often taken for the profound. Here, however, time plays an odd trick; it dissipates

obscurity as a breeze dissipates fog, and then are discovered not the great truths we hoped for, but painted trifles. Thus time has made most of Mallarmé's poems quite clear and we see that all that labyrinthine imagery hid from the vulgar nothing more abstruse than the poetic commonplaces of the day. All that remains to delight us is a number of pellucid and beautiful phrases.

It gives you a curious sensation to go from the room in which the El Grecos are hung into the Velasquez room next door. It is like coming into the warm light of common day. You cannot but feel that Velasquez is somewhat superficial, but he is superficial on the grand scale. He had an equable, sunny temperament and his pictures are delightfully gay. He had that *alegría* which is the Andalusian's most cherished and characteristic grace. He does not in his portraits suggest a criticism of his sitters. He takes them at their face value. He was the greatest of court painters. His charm was combined with a genial heartlessness. His dwarfs and fools are painted with amusement. So might Shakespeare have drawn them. He had no feeling for the horror of their deformity or the misery of their lot. His cheerful temper enabled him to look upon these loathsome abortions with the good humour of one who knew that the Almighty had created them to be the playthings of princes. I suppose no one can deny his miraculous skill in painting, the silvery lustre of his blacks and the richness of his sober tones. He could paint the dress of an infanta in such a manner as to take one's breath away. But even as one admires one is filled with a slight sense of uneasiness and one asks oneself whether this wonderful skill is worth while. It reminds one of a writer who says things with a most engaging sobriety, but says nothing of any great consequence. But how skilfully these figures are placed on the canvas to make a pattern pleasing to the eye! In the full-length of Philip IV with his gun and in the companion picture of the Cardinal-Infante pure representation seems to achieve perfect beauty. There is nothing to be said. You can only stand and gape.

When you go back to the El Greco room you enter a troubled world. Here is a wild intensity that seems to seek utterance for no emotion that can be made clear by symbols. It is a vague and tormenting sensation that seems to oppress him, like that anxiety, common at times to us all, I suppose, to which no cause can be assigned; you do not know whether it is of the body or the spirit.

It was not a man of equable and sunny temper who painted these pictures, but a man of uncertain humour perplexed by fantastic longings; it was a man striving with pain for an expression that he sought in the abyss of his soul as though it were a memory hovering just below consciousness that it exasperated him to be unable to recall. But if he was a mystic, his mysticism must surely be sought in another sphere than the religious. Pacheco, who saw him in his old age, says of El Greco that he was a great philosopher, very witty in his speech, personal, profound, with an original answer to everything. We know that he was luxurious and improvident; indeed he died insolvent; the portraits he painted of himself suggest scepticism and irony; and one's own sensibility persuades one that he was very lonely. Even in Rome he had a high conceit of himself and later on his arrogance was overweening. In the action over his remuneration for *The Burial of Count Orgaz* he finished his pleadings with the words: "as true as it is that the payment is inferior to the value of my sublime work, my name will pass to posterity, which will recompense my work and glorify the author as one of the greatest geniuses of Spanish painting." He was a Levantine, and the Levantines are apt to express themselves with grandiloquence. No writer can have gone to Alexandria or Beyrout without being visited by some young author who tells him in bad but fluent French that he has written a novel vastly better than anything that Balzac, Anatole France, or Zola ever wrote. It is a bombastic use of words that does not preclude a real and often touching modesty. But humility is the very substance of the soil on which religious mysticism grows and it would be absurd to say that El Greco had it. There is a story which, if true, shows that he was something of an actor and the art of bluff was not unfamiliar to him. The story runs as follows: Tristan, his pupil, had painted for a stipulated price a picture for the Hieronimite monks of the convent of Sisle, but when the picture was finished the monks (doubtless with justice) thought it was not worth it and wanted to pay less. The matter was submitted to the arbitration of El Greco. He looked at the picture and then, flying into a passion, began to beat Tristan with his stick. The monks interposed. "Tristan is but young," they said, "and does not understand that he is asking too much." "Too much!" cried El Greco. "It is a sublime and beautiful work and I am beating him for daring to ask two hundred ducats for a picture that is worth five hundred, and if you don't

pay the money at once I'm going to take it myself." The monks paid.

Taking it all in all you have the impression of a man who possessed most of the traits that we generally hold to be typical of the Levantine, and if you combined these ingeniously I do not think it would be impossible to construct an image coherent enough to be credible. The various particulars fit like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. The flaw lies in the fact that there is nothing in the sort of man you have thus created to account for the pictures he painted. One must look further.

Not long ago I came across the suggestion, made in a ribald spirit, that El Greco was homosexual. I have thought it worth considering. So far as an artist's work is concerned there is as a rule little interest in knowing about his sexual life, upon which indeed an exaggerated stress is generally laid. There is a notion that men who have in any way greatly distinguished themselves should in this respect be different from their fellows, and when the student discovers that they have had love affairs he is apt to think the fact strangely significant. For all the to-do that has been made over the amours of Shelley and Byron, I cannot but doubt whether they were very different from those of other young men of their class. Many a smart young broker in the City of London would have looked upon them with supercilious amusement as extremely meagre. But when it comes to an abnormality the case is different. I have suggested that talent consists in an individual way of seeing the world combined with a natural aptitude for creation and that genius is talent with a greater capacity and a universal sympathy. Now it cannot be denied that the homosexual has a narrower outlook on the world than the normal man. In certain respects the natural responses of the species are denied to him. Some at least of the broad and typical human emotions he can never experience. However subtly he sees life he cannot see it whole. If it were not for the perplexing *Sonnets* I should say that the homosexual can never reach the supreme heights of genius. I cannot now help asking myself whether what I see in El Greco's work of tortured fantasy and sinister strangeness is not due to such a sexual abnormality as this. I hasten to add that this can be nothing but surmise, as is all else I have said of him. Besides his pictures, the letter of Julio Clovio, certain legal documents, his death certificate, and the list of his effects there is no material for any direct knowledge of him. Whatever does not

proceed from this, however confidently it is stated, can be no more than plausible.

When you survey possibilities it must be admitted that there is in this one a good deal that saves it from being wildly improbable. El Greco spent his childhood and youth in places where he can have conceived no instinctive aversion to that idiosyncrasy. I should say that a distinctive trait of the homosexual is a lack of deep seriousness over certain things that normal men take seriously. This ranges from an inane flippancy to a sardonic humour. He has a wilfulness that attaches importance to things that most men find trivial and on the other hand regards cynically the subjects which the common opinion of mankind has held essential to its spiritual welfare. He has a lively sense of beauty, but is apt to see beauty especially in decoration. He loves luxury and attaches peculiar value to elegance. He is emotional, but fantastic. He is vain, loquacious, witty, and theatrical. With his keen insight and quick sensibility he can pierce the depths, but in his innate frivolity he fetches up from them not a priceless jewel but a tinsel ornament. He has small power of invention, but a wonderful gift for delightful embroidery. He has vitality, brilliance, but seldom strength. He stands on the bank, aloof and ironical, and watches the river of life flow on. He is persuaded that opinion is no more than prejudice. In short he has many of the characteristics that surprise us in El Greco. It may be that in this abnormality lies the explanation why his pictures fail of that ultimate greatness which is release. They thrill; they do not give you peace. They excite; but do not satisfy. We know that whatever imagination El Greco had he did not apply it to the composition of his pictures. The learned have traced the patterns of some of them to the Byzantine icons with which he may be presumed to have been familiar in his early youth, and of others to pictures he had seen in Italy. It is curious that in the full flush of his early manhood, when fancy is generally exuberant, he should have been content so often to take his designs from the woodcuts, engravings, and etchings that were at that time current articles of commerce in Italy. When he had to invent something out of his head he was not remarkable. *The Burial of Count Orgaz* betrays its Byzantine inspiration. A dozen artists in Italy could have arranged it on a more satisfactory plan. It is only the miraculous painting that prevents that row of heads, cutting the picture into two parts, from being disconcerting. And when he had to repre-

sent the martyrdom of St. Maurice he shirked it and painted a group of young men who might be discussing the handicapping for the school sports. There is in Toledo a San Bernardino, with a tiny head, a courtly little pointed beard, and an immensely long body against a gloomy sky, which is quite charming; but in the same way as the twisted pillars of a plateresque patio are charming. It is a delicious picture for a great lady's oratory. But it could hardly arouse devotion. It is perfectly frivolous. I think no religious painter ever expressed emotion so perfunctorily as El Greco. This would not be strange if he were entirely devoid of it.

A little while ago, confessing a former error, I made a distinction between the artist's work from his creative standpoint and its communication, which is what the layman is concerned with. I think a good deal of criticism is rendered less illuminating than it should be because critics often do not clearly distinguish between the two. They step from one to the other without realising that they are doing so. There need be no relation between them. The artist is not justified in claiming to be judged from the standpoint of his intention. That is important to him, and to anyone who cares to study his personality, but it is of no importance to the observer. The artist is driven to produce by an instinct within him that impels him to express his personality. He does not try to do this; it is an inevitable accident that he does so. He is in all probability not very much interested in his personality. (I am not speaking of the journeyman who busies himself with the arts to earn an honest living or the spent worker who continues to do so from habit.) The artist can no more help creating than water can help running downhill. It is a release from the burden on his soul. It is a spiritual exercise which is infinitely pleasurable, and it is accompanied by a sense of power that is in itself delightful. When production fulfils it he enjoys a heavenly sense of liberation. For one delicious moment he rests in a state of equilibrium. What the painter paints or the writer writes is an experience of himself and the theorists of art for art's sake were right when they claimed that it had no moral value. Nor need this experience and its expression, whatever its importance for the person who feels it, have any value for anybody else. That must depend on the interest for the world of the personality that has thus been forced to exteriorise itself.

I think there are two ways in which El Greco sought deliverance. One was in decoration. To my mind he was singularly indifferent

to his subjects. They were given him and like all artists he worked out his own intentions within the limitations imposed upon him by the circumstances of his time. That is why he could paint the same picture over and over again. These saints, Francis or Antony, meant no more to him than did their abstract designs to the early cubists. To him they were merely excuses for his decorative inventions. And that is why he was so much more interested in the hand than in the head. The hand has a possibility of lovely gesture that is denied to the head. No one has painted hands more exquisitely. But in many of the pictures they are placed with such an affected grace that, considering the episode represented, you are shocked by the unseemliness. El Greco was ready to sacrifice truth of gesture to beauty of attitude. His reaction was, in short, baroque.

The reader must pardon me if I indulge now in a short disquisition on baroque. I do this not only because I think the subject in itself interesting, but because I seem to discern in that form of art and the circumstances that brought it about much that corresponds with the art of the present day and the conditions in which we are now living. I suppose everyone is agreed that massivity and movement are the essentials of baroque. It used decoration not to complete a composition, but for its own sake; and its wonderful discovery was that movement was decorative. The spectacular nature of architecture has caused the learned to study baroque particularly in that art. This has made it a little more difficult to discover its distinctive features. The decorative element is not so noticeable in a building because the architect has made it for a certain use and this use conditions his treatment. But when you look more closely you cannot but see how much these great artists were concerned with it. They aimed at unity, whereas the Renaissance architects were content to make a harmonious composition of self-subsisting parts; and unity of effect is the first demand of decoration. We hesitate when we are told that the baroque architects sought to represent movement and our inclination is to think that they were aiming at something foreign to the spirit of their art and therefore necessarily bad. The play they made with light and shade seems like a device to deceive the eye into accepting what is contrary to nature. It takes a little while to recognise that mass is but an instant in the unending curve of movement. It is not my business here to point out the various uses they made of the expedients at their command and

the triumphant success with which they achieved their ends. But the sway of baroque was by no means confined to architecture; it affected the painters and sculptors too, the writers, and, I should imagine, the musicians. Indeed I suspect that it gave their art for the first time the possibility of reaching the cloud-capped heights which Beethoven and Wagner attained. But of music I know nothing. I went to Cambridge to ask a great authority whether there was anything in my surmise, but thinking perhaps that it was no affair of mine he would not tell me.

Baroque is often considered to be the characteristic expression of the Counter-Reformation. It seems unlikely that it was created by it. The Counter-Reformation built new churches and restored old ones. The artists who worked in them were baroque artists. They were sentimental, violent, and theatrical as was the religion of the period, but not necessarily on account of it. Religion was declamatory; it exaggerated the manifestations of its piety in reaction from the pagan scepticism of the Renaissance and in challenge to the Lutheran strenuousness. It suited very well the new style the artists were now making use of; the extravagant emotions they were asked to express gave them an opportunity to use movement for purely decorative purposes and movement they could only represent by mass. I should have said that the Counter-Reformation, so far as it was not dictated by fear, corresponded to a feeling that was in the air and it was this feeling that created the universal tendency towards the baroque.

It is interesting to consider why this absorption in decoration, which to my mind is the essence of the style, should just at this time have made itself felt. Some writers have ascribed it to a normal reaction from the preceding period. The Renaissance was over and people were tired of the works it had produced. That was very natural, for man desires change and he wearies even of perfection. Beauty is a full stop and when you have reached it you can do nothing but start another sentence. The inspiration that the discovery of the antique had brought was exhausted. But boredom with one style cannot give rise to another; a new style arises from a new state of the spirit.

The Renaissance cultivated measure and repose. It cherished the golden mean. Its strength was tranquil. Art not only occupied an important part in men's lives, but the artists felt themselves in conformity with the life about them. They were citizens of the State as well as artists. Sin was original sin and the individual did

not feel himself answerable for it. Man was free, if not always in fact, in imagination. And freedom was the most cherished of his ideals.

But the attempt to think again the thoughts and live once more the life enshrined in the literatures of Greece and Rome failed. Liberty died. Half of Italy was in the hands of Spain and the rest in the power of petty tyrants. The Inquisition, fostered by the Spanish Kings as an instrument of State, acquired a new power in Italy. Incidents here and there in the picaresque novels prove the terror it inspired. Catholicism was restored by force. The Church claimed control over all the activities of the human mind, its philosophy, its science, and its art. A strange disquiet oppressed the spirits of men. It seemed as though in their long struggle with intellect they had grown exhausted. Believers, notwithstanding, were uneasy, and they drowned their hesitations in a sea of declamation. They were intolerant because they were afraid. Man was deprived of his inalienable right of self-realisation and freedom was lost to him, it seemed for ever.

Freedom is man's greatest good. When you rob the artist of this you force him back upon himself. When he can no longer deal with the great issues of life that in happier times occupy the souls of men, his instinct of creation, which nevertheless demands expression, can but turn to decoration. When men are wretched they look into their hearts and some inexplicable instinct leads them to ascribe their misery to their own shortcomings. Their minds turn to another world and they look for solace to their vexed spirits in the eternal. Sin was no longer original sin; it was personal, and a rigid reckoning would be demanded of the sinner. Decoration with its vague meanings can very well express the desire for the unearthly, the vague fear and the sense of guilt that haunted the souls of men to whom the healthy and inspiring activity of free men was denied. The Renaissance, essentially objective, copied and idealised nature; but baroque used nature as a vehicle to display its own morbid sensibility. It was subjective. And the most direct expression of the subjective is decoration. It is worth while to consider for a moment how the writers reacted to the conditions in which they found themselves. They turned away from matter and busied themselves with form. They sought brilliant and exquisite conceits, no matter how frivolous, and put them in the manner most calculated to surprise. They cultivated rhetoric, the play upon words, flowers of speech, archaisms, and

such-like toys. They wanted to show their cleverness rather than to discover their hearts. All artists have in them something of the child. They like to play and if they lack serious and great convictions are very likely to squander their faculties on spiritual kickshaws. They do not try to make bread without leaven; they try to make bread with nothing but leaven. Michelangelo, resuming in himself the restlessness and dissatisfaction of the age, tried by vastness, by violence, to express the passion of his tortured heart, and so became in the plastic arts the father of baroque. His contemporaries and successors felt the significance of what he had invented. Realising quickly the immense decorative value of mass and movement they began with growing assurance to make them the principles of their activity. But because they lacked his spiritual power their works seldom achieved his complete sincerity; and decoration, which had been grave and sincere because it corresponded to a deep instinct in the artist's nature, degenerated with time to the frivolous ornament of rococo.

Now let me return to El Greco. There was in him to my mind a temper that exactly suited the spirit that he found prevalent to some extent in Venice, and at its height in Rome. So he became the greatest of baroque painters. Looking at the whole series of his pictures I seem to see his interest in decoration for decoration's sake grow in intensity. His contemporaries thought that he painted in an increasingly fantastic manner because he went mad. I do not believe it. More recently it has been suggested that he suffered from astigmatism and it has been said that if you put on the right glasses his vertiginous figures would assume normal proportions. I do not believe it. Their immense elongation, which, I may remind the reader, he will find also in many of Tintoretto's pictures, seems to me a natural development of treating the human form as decoration. Because El Greco was aiming at this and nothing else I think he grew more and more indifferent to fact. This, I think, explains also his cock-eyed Virgins. If the body, with its mass, is treated as a unit of expression the face becomes of no importance. It is not strange that the moderns should set such great store by El Greco. If he were alive to-day I imagine he would paint pictures as abstract as the later work of Braque, Picasso, and Fernand Léger. And it may be that the interest in formal design of the present day is due to the same causes as produced baroque art in the sixteenth century. Now too we are spiritually at sixes and

sevens. Afraid of the sublime, we take refuge in the multiplication table.

For now the world is sullen and jealous as was the world of the Counter-Reformation. The great issues that occupied the Victorians, which seemed to offer the spirit boundless horizons, have played us false. We mock at those who maunder of truth, goodness, and beauty. We are afraid of greatness. And we too have lost the inestimable blessing of freedom. Liberty throughout the world is dying or dead. Like the Jesuit novice who lost his personality to find it again in the Company, we are asked to surrender our own to find it again in the State. Nobody dares tackle great subjects and the heresy has become orthodox that subject is of no consequence. Only the pretty, the ingenious, the amusing are cultivated. Artists have not yet learnt how to deal with what really matters to our world and so are driven to devote themselves to decoration. They make technical devices the end and aim of their endeavour. They have cast off the shackles of tradition, but use their independence to stand on their heads and, like Hippocleides, kick their legs in the air. Modern critics are wrong when they blame writers for writing about themselves. When art is no more than a side issue they have nothing else to write about.

But of course there is more in El Greco than the fantastic patterns he devised, his grace and distinction, the elegance of his gestures and his dramatic intensity, seldom falling into theatricalism, with which as I take it he satisfied the sardonic, ironic, sumptuous, sinister side of his nature. When you see many of a painter's pictures together you find in them often a certain monotony. An artist can only give you himself and he is unfortunately always very like himself. The startling thing about El Greco is that, such is his vitality, he can under the most unlikely conditions give you an impression of variety. Take for instance that collection of the Apostles which is in what is now called La Casa del Greco. They are three-quarter-lengths, canvases of the same size, and the personages are not happily individualised; but the vigour with which they are painted makes them lively and different. You feel in them the stubborn idiosyncrasy of their creator, in wonderful possession of his faculties, who, regardless of what people thought, was getting marvellous satisfaction out of their exercise. Then there is his colour. This, I think, was the second of the two methods by which he strove to release his spirit from its burden; and it is his colour that makes him so wonderful an artist. A

painter thinks with his brushes. Such thoughts as he has that can be put into words are for the most part commonplace. Why artists are often incomprehensible to other people is that they express their profoundest feelings in a language of their own. I think El Greco put the most serious emotion of his strange, perhaps inexplicable, personality into the colours that he set down on canvas. However he acquired his palette, he gave it an intensity, a significance, which were his own. Colour was his complete and unique experience. They are not so far wrong who see in him a mystic, though I cannot help thinking that to look upon him as a religious mystic is superficial. If mysticism is that state that renders you conscious of depths of truth unknown to the intellect, revealing like "glimpses of forgotten dreams" a greater significance in life and union with some larger reality, then I think you can hardly fail to find it in El Greco's painting. I seem to see as great a mystic rapture in the painting of the right side of the body of Christ in the *Crucifixion* in the Louvre as in any of the experiences of Santa Teresa.

X

NO one can travel through the various paths of the Spanish scene in the sixteenth century without getting a frequent glimpse of that mysticism that seems to dwell only just below the threshold of consciousness in so many of these passionate men who, you would have thought, were completely immersed in the turmoil of the world. In Spain you are seldom long out of sight of the mountains. They rise before you, arid, gaunt, and austere; blue on the far horizon, they seem to summon you to a new and magic world. The Sierra Nevada with its mantle of snow is remote and formidable, but in the dawn or at sunset shines with a coloured beauty not of this earth. And so mysticism, never very far away, unobtrusive but insistent, with its strange attraction that all the human in you resists, seems to haunt the shadows that darken the brilliant prospect. It is like a troubling, tragic, and lovely theme that runs through a florid symphony. It is disconcerting and yet you cannot but attend to it.

The idea I had in mind did not allow me to neglect a phase that seemed to me so characteristic of the life I was studying, but I was conscious that I must tread warily. They say that to understand mysticism you must be a mystic, as to understand love you must

be a lover. And Catholic mysticism demands a belief in certain affirmations that many of us find it impossible to accept. This is not the place for me to say what my own beliefs are in the matters with which religion deals, but it is only proper that I should state my conviction that no one of the faiths that men have embraced is ample enough to account for the enormous mystery. They seem to me like blind alleys cut into a primeval jungle and man deceives himself when he thinks they can lead him to its heart.

I think the mystic is in error when he regards mysticism as essentially religious. I do not think religious mysticism is its only form; I should hesitate even to admit that it was its highest. If the mystical experience is a liberating sense of community with what for want of a better word we name reality, and this you can call as you will the Absolute or God, then at some time we are all in greater or less degree mystics. Did not Plotinus say that the power of spiritual intuition was a faculty that all possess, though few use? The sap of the Mystic Vine may be set flowing in more ways than one. The mystical experience is an awareness of a greater significance in the universe, "other than the known and above the unknown," a dissolution of the self into a wider self; and this is accompanied by a great rush of vitality, a feeling of power, a sense of union with God or nature, and a strangely exhilarating feeling that depths upon depths of truth are within one's grasp. It is an ecstasy. But you can get it, if you are that way inclined, from a glass of cold beer, from the sight of a well-remembered scene, from opium, from love, by prayer and fasting and mortification of the flesh, and, if you are an artist, in the excitement of creation.

It is a natural, though unreasonable, instinct to judge of the value of a thing by its origin, and it is hard to accept the fact that the ecstasy that may be aroused in a weary man from drinking a glass of beer can have as much worth as that of the monk in his cell when a divine rapture rewards his long vigil and urgent prayer. But the ecstasy is the same and its value lies in its results. On this point all the mystics are agreed. St. Teresa, tormented by the fear that her experiences were the work of the devil, states that the only test is the effect they have. The mystical experience is valuable only if it strengthens the character and enables him who has enjoyed it to do great things.

The Spanish mystics, the only ones I know at first hand, and that, I must admit, but inadequately, are not, if I may say so, lively reading. Spanish writers have never cultivated the austere virtue

of concision and when they deal with religious subjects feel no call to check their verbosity. They write not to entertain the reader, but to the glory of God; and it is perhaps natural for them to suppose that they achieve this object more nobly by dissertations of great length. The mystics suffer also from the disadvantage that they all have very much the same thing to say. Their peculiar experience seems to each of them extremely important, as indeed it is, but it is not sufficiently different from mystic to mystic to make it easy to peruse with patience the various accounts. On one occasion I found myself in foreign parts with the complete works of St. Teresa and nothing much else that I wanted to read at the moment, so with the exception of one or two short pieces that were too ejaculatory for my taste I read them all. Though doubtless I did not obtain from them the spiritual edification I might have, they gave me a great deal of enjoyment. The critics say she was a careless writer, but she always managed to get into her writing that sound of the living voice that we all, for the most part without success, aim at; and there was nothing she wrote in which she failed to display her vivacious, charming, wilful, spirited, and determined character. She was, if not a great, a grand woman. Maria de San José describes her as of medium height, but on the tall side. In her youth she was thought beautiful and she retained traces of good looks to the end of her life. Her face was neither round nor long, her brow broad and comely; the eyebrows were thick and arched, of a reddish colour; her eyes black and vivacious, not very large but well placed in her face. She was of good proportions, stout rather than slender, and her hands were small and shapely. She was not indifferent to her looks, indeed she accused herself of the fault in confession, and when Fray Juan de la Misericordia did a portrait of her she cried, on looking at it: "God forgive you for having painted me, Brother John, for you have painted me ugly and bleary-eyed."

The life that St. Teresa wrote of herself is one of the great autobiographies of the world. It does not stand too far below *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. She wrote her more important works only at the command of her confessors, but when you read her life you can hardly resist the conviction that it would have been a very subtle confessor who avoided commanding her to do what she had set her heart on. One of the greatest mercies vouchsafed to her took the form of private communication from the Lord, in which for the most part he ordered her to do what she had very

much a mind to do. He even enjoined her to write down his observations so that men might profit by them, though some must have offended her deep humility and others to the modern reader must seem a trifle lacking in piquancy. It hardly needed a voice from heaven to tell us that true security consists in the testimony of a good conscience. It is perhaps a little unexpected to hear the Lord apprising St. Teresa of the fact that it was the devil who had caused the Lutherans to remove the images from their churches in order to deprive them of the possibility of correcting their errors, from which ensued that they were all damned. Once indeed he gave her an assurance which the event so little substantiated that one can only imagine that omnipotence sometimes takes a rest. For the Lord told St. Teresa that Father Jeronimo Gracian, a confessor for whom she had a particular attachment, was his real son and that he would never cease to help him. She could hardly have anticipated from this that his life would be one of extreme vexation. He got on the wrong side of most of the people he had to do with and was forced to resign pretty well every appointment his talents secured him. He was clapped into the prison of his monastery by direction of his superiors and finally expelled from his order. He was rejected by all the other orders that he tried to enter. He was captured by Turks, branded with red-hot irons, loaded with chains, and thrown into an underground dungeon where he was given black and verminous bread to eat and water to drink so foul that none could have drunk it unless he were dying of thirst. Seldom indeed has the rod been so little spared.

St. Teresa offers the best account that for my part I have read of the various steps of the Mystic Way, and since its main lines can be given very briefly I hope the reader will forgive me if I here state them. The first stage is called Purgation and in this the Soul, aware of Divine Beauty, realises its own nothingness. By prayer and mortification it prepares itself for the second stage, of Illumination. In this the Soul begins to recollect itself and touches the supernatural. St. Teresa calls it the Prayer of Quiet. It is a period of rich contemplation. The faculties are not lost, neither do they sleep, but they are gathered up within the soul; and only the will is alive. And the will surrenders itself to God. It desires nothing and asks nothing. Some reach this. Few pass beyond. The third stage is the state of Union and this is the goal of the Mystic Way. It is a glorious folly, a heavenly madness, says the saint, in which

is learnt true wisdom, and it is an exquisite enjoyment of the soul. It offers peace, strength, and certainty. But it is impossible to explain. "He that has experienced it will understand something of it, for it cannot be told more clearly, since what here occurs is so obscure. All I can say is that one feels that one is joined with God, and so great a certainty of this remains that in no way can one cease to believe it."

But St. Teresa never lost her fear that these states of the soul might be inspired by the Evil One and she sought constant reassurance from her confessors. She was suspicious of such experiences when they occurred to the nuns under her charge. When she spoke of those moments of ecstasy when the soul losing consciousness was seized by the rapture of the Divine Vision, she did not fail to add a warning: "This is the end of that spiritual union," she told the nuns, "that there may be born of it works, works."

It is now that one is inclined to pause. For, as everyone knows, the saint's great achievement was the reform of the Order of Carmel. Starting with one small convent at Avila she presently founded houses both for men and women in other places. I have always been a little sorry for the poor nuns on whom her zeal forced a stricter rule. It is true that they no longer fasted, as they had originally done, from Holy Cross Day till Easter, nor lived in perpetual solitude; visitors were allowed and the nuns were permitted to leave the precincts of their house. But it must be remembered that the conventual life was adopted in Spain at that period for motives that were not exclusively religious. The entail of estates on eldest sons forced the younger ones either to enter the army or the Church, and in the humbler ranks of society the Church offered clever men their only chance of advancement. The times were insecure and means of livelihood hard to come by. The cloister promised safety and at least bed and board. Trade was disastrous and those engaged in it were despised. It was only natural that men should put their sons to a calling that kept them alive and was honourable besides. Nor was it always an urgent devotion that led women to the nunnery. Great gentlemen often could not give their daughters a dowry sufficient to marry them suitably and the convent was a dignified way of disposing of them. With the wars in Flanders and the attraction of the Indies, men were scarce and many women had no chance of marrying. The convent was their refuge. It offered the disconsolate widow a respectable retreat from the temptations to which her condition

was liable. It was the refuge also of girls whose reputation had by their own fault or by an accident been tarnished, and the faintest breath of suspicion was enough to sully a Spanish woman's delicate honour. The reader will remember the Mayor of Zalamea's sardonic remark, "The Lord is not fastidious of the quality of his brides." In fact there were a dozen reasons for a woman to enter a religious house other than the love of God. It is not astonishing if these women, performing their duties with sufficient exactitude, sought such alleviations as they could get for a life that only a perfervid piety could save from being very monotonous. They were simple and industrious; they fed the poor who came to their gates, and if they were not more than reasonably pious, they were harmless. It was always possible even in these circumstances for a nun to lead a life devoted entirely to prayer and mortification. It is no wonder that considerable resistance was set up when Teresa de Jesus sought to restore her order to its primitive severity.

There was a plague of nuns and monks in Spain. Whole families entered the Church; of the five brothers and sisters of the Jesuit Baltasar Gracian, all but one who died young were members of a religious order. To save his soul was in the sixteenth century the main business of a Spaniard. It has been reckoned that thirty per cent of the population were in the Church. Not only were politicians and economists alarmed, but the clergy themselves. The authorities of Madrid and Toledo petitioned for a reduction of the number of religious and the Bishop of Badajoz noted the abundance of convents as one of the ills that were ruining the country. To their number then St. Teresa, regardless of everything but salvation, added. Her fame and the attraction for the Spanish character of the austerity of the rule led many who would otherwise have been content with the life of the world to take the vows. But with the growing distress of the country the Lord was providing for his brides with increasing inadequacy; it was all very well to look upon privation as a mortification pleasing in his sight, the poor nuns were obliged to eat to keep body and soul together and in certain convents they were just dying of hunger. The bishops were in consequence determined that no religious house should be founded unless it was properly endowed. They frowned on the fancy to set up houses of their own that nuns of position or character sometimes took. But the bishops were no match for Teresa de Jesus. With the prestige of her visions and the Redeemer's very words to support her she got as usual her own way.

The order was divided and the Discalced Carmelites formed into a distinct province. The energetic saint founded no less than thirty-two houses. Her nuns lived entirely upon alms. They were to have no income, the Lord would provide; and in the Constitutions (a document very revealing of her character) she lays down that if there was food it should be eaten at eleven in winter and at ten in summer; but that no regular hour could be fixed, for it must depend upon what the Lord gave. It may be that St. Teresa's example was salutary to many and that a number of religious who followed her rule found salvation, but it can hardly be denied that her activity assisted in the ruin of her unhappy country.

But none of this is very much to my purpose. I have been seduced into writing this short piece by the interest which, as a novelist, I have not been able to help feeling in her curious personality. She was not, I think, a woman of remarkable intelligence but she had charm, determination, and courage. These are the traits that effect great things in the world. They do not always effect wise ones.

In *The Book of the Foundations*, a work rich in entertainment, full of good sense, humour, and curious anecdote, there is a charming account of the founding of a convent at Salamanca. St. Teresa, accompanied only by Sister Mary of the Sacrament, arrived there on the Eve of All Souls about midday after travelling great part of the night in excessive cold. She was in poor health. From the inn she sent for a good man, Nicolas Gutierrez, whom she had entrusted with the work of making a house ready for her. It had been no easy matter to get it, since it was not the season for letting houses and it was in possession of a number of students who were most unwilling to leave. Nicolas Gutierrez told her that the house was not yet empty, for he had been unable to get the students out. The good Mother told him how important it was for her to move in at once, so he went to the landlord and so arranged things that it was empty by evening. But when the two nuns were able to go in it was dusk. The students had left the house in bad order, and so dirty that they had not a little work to do that night. It was large and rambling, with many garrets, and Mary of the Sacrament, more timorous than her stout-hearted Superior, could not get the students out of her thoughts. They had been so loth to go she was afraid some of them might still be hiding in the house. The women shut themselves up in a room with straw in it, "that being the first thing I provided for founding the house, for with straw

we could not fail to have a bed." The Fathers of the Company of Jesus had lent them a couple of blankets. When the door was safely closed Sister Mary seemed somewhat more at her ease about the students, but she kept looking about her first on this side and then on that.

"I asked her why she was looking about, seeing that no one could possibly come in," says Teresa.

"She replied: 'Mother, I am thinking, if I were to die now what would you do by yourself?'"

Teresa could not help thinking it would be a horrible thing. She was a little startled, because though she did not actually fear dead bodies they made her nervous, even when there was someone with her. But she answered:

"Sister, should that happen I will think what to do. Now let me go to sleep."

As they had spent two bad nights, sleep soon put an end to their tremors. Next morning Mass was said in that house for the first time. But Teresa could never afterwards think of Sister Mary's trepidation without wanting to laugh.

Yes, a woman of character.

It is character too that makes Fray Luis de Leon a fascinating subject and in his case I feel that I have some justification for dwelling upon him for a little. He died in 1591, so the hero of my book could hardly have listened to his lectures, but I like to think that when he was studying at Salamanca he might have come in contact with the young Augustinian whom in one of his works Fray Luis calls Julianio and from him heard something of the master of Spanish prose.

Salamanca is an agreeable place to linger in. It has a noble square, with arches all round it, and here towards evening the whole population perambulates, the men in one direction, the girls in the other, so that they may ogle one another as they pass. The town hall, with its plateresque façade, is rose-coloured. The mass of the cathedral seen from a little distance is fine; it seems to be planted on the ground with a sort of solid arrogance; but when you approach you are repelled by its ugly reddish brown and the florid decoration. The interior is overwhelmingly magnificent. There are huge, lofty pillars that tower to a height that seems hardly believable. The choir is surrounded by elaborate bas-reliefs. It is all so grand and sumptuous, it reminds you of a Lord Mayor's banquet; it suggests a ceremonial, assured, opulent

religion, and you ask yourself what solace in trouble the stricken heart could hope to find there.

At the University, sadly fallen from its ancient glory, I went to see the lecture-room of Fray Luis, a whitewashed room, large, dark, and square, with a vaulted ceiling. Narrow benches and narrow desks fill the whole space, and at the side is a long, boxed-off passage where, it appears, the spectators stood. Over the pulpit at the back is a wooden hood somewhat like a great extinguisher. It is from this pulpit that Fray Luis, according to the legend, in which, however, the learned declare there is no truth, gave that lecture the first words of which have carried his name down to posterity more firmly than any of his works. After four years in the prisons of the Inquisition he was acquitted and returned to Salamanca. He was received to the sound of drums and trumpets by a great concourse of gentlemen, professors at the University, and students, who came out on to the road from Valladolid to meet him. After a due interval he gave his first lecture. A crowd collected to hear him. They expected him to attack his accusers and once more to speak in his own defence. He began with the words: "As we were saying yesterday."

While he was in prison he wrote his most celebrated work. It is called *De los Nombres de Cristo*. This book is in the form of a dialogue between three friends in the Augustinian order whom the heat of summer has brought to the house of the community on the Tormes a few miles from Salamanca. It was called La Flecha. The scene of the various conversations is in the garden of this and on a little island in the river. I thought I should like to see a spot so celebrated in Spanish letters and, having inquired the way, set out; but after driving for some time I began to think I had lost it. Presently I met a fat young priest, with a round, red face and spectacles, who was strolling along the road reading his breviary. I stopped the car and asked him if he could direct me. He seemed glad to do so. He was a poor parish priest, in a shabby cassock discoloured by sun and rain, and he talked in a high-pitched voice. He was very polite and when he got into the car to show me the way took off his hat, but when he put it on again seemed very uncertain which was the front and which the back. He never stopped smoking cigarettes he deftly rolled himself.

After a while he put up his hand and we stopped. A rough path led to the shady garden, surrounded by a hedge of box, where the friar sat and chatted with his friends. A brook ran by it, a tiny

trickle of very clear water, and beyond was an orchard. It was a quiet and pleasant spot and the coolness was grateful in the heat of the Castilian summer. The priest showed me this place with a sort of proprietary air that I found very delightful, and then he did a singular thing. He began to recite.

"Era por el mes de Junio, à las bueltas de la fiesta de San Juan, al tiempo que en Salamanca comiençan à cessar los estudios . . ."

It was the beginning of the book, and the liquid, elegantly balanced periods fell from his lips like music. On his fat, red face was a look of rapture.

"What a memory!" I cried, when at last he stopped.

"I have read it so often. I often have long walks to the farms in my parish, three and four and five leagues, and it shortens the way if I repeat to myself my favourite passages. No one ever wrote Spanish like my Fray Luis."

Then he said he would show me the island on which Fray used to walk and we returned to the high road. This offered a wide prospect over the plain of Castile. In the distance the hills were diaphanous. We walked along the river, bordered with handsome, close-growing poplars, till we came to a farm built on the bank of the river, and here on a little terrace overlooking the water a woman with a handkerchief over her head was busy sewing. She greeted the shabby young priest with affection and me with civility and we passed through a mill on to the island. Beyond the mill-race the water seemed only just to flow. On the farther bank was a line of poplars and then the fields dry and brown after the harvest. A faint, pleasant breeze blew on the island, and here in a little circle of trees was a table where tradition says the friar sat and wrote. Now holiday-makers come on Sundays to picnic and the ground was strewn with old newspaper. The spot was enchantingly peaceful. The broad, placid river had a curious effect on one. One's mind was tranquil, but at the same time alert and buoyant.

But the recollection I brought away from the excursion was of this stolid peasant priest reciting line after line of that harmonious prose.

I have read the book from which he quoted, not every word of it, but a great deal. It consists of a series of homilies upon the appellations given to Jesus Christ in the scriptures, and I must admit I should have found it heavy going but for the charming descriptions with which the dialogues open, the digressions and

illustrations, and the revelations here and there of the author's character. The reflections which are aroused in him by the subject of his discourse do not seem to me of great subtlety. I should have thought them within the scope of any pious man who had an intimate acquaintance with theological literature.

To me there seems something extraordinarily modern about Luis de Leon. He was not all of a piece as so often appear the famous figures of the past. I do not suppose men then were any different from what they are now, but it looks as though to their contemporaries they seemed more homogeneous. Otherwise they could hardly have so often described them in terms of "humours". But Fray Luis was a contradictory creature in whom dwelt uneasily incongruous qualities and warring instincts. Pacheco, the father-in-law of Velasquez, has painted him in a few words: a little man, but well proportioned, with a big head covered with curly hair, a wide forehead, a round, rather than a long, swarthy face, and sparkling green eyes. He was vain and humble, impetuous and patient, sombre, peevish, bitter, loyal, and chivalrous. He loathed fools and hypocrites. He was very tender to little children. He loved nature and truth. He was fearless. No matter what enmities he aroused he was always prepared to denounce tyranny; he would incur any danger to combat injustice. He was an ascetic, of great abstemiousness, and he seldom allowed himself the luxury of going to bed, so that the servitor who entered his cell in the morning found it as he had left it the night before. But he loved the fair things of life, the lovely, lulling sound of the Tormes flowing by La Flecha, the heavenly music of blind Salinas, and the colour and cadence of the Spanish tongue. He was quarrelsome, rude, violent, and he yearned above all else for peace. The cry for rest, rest from the turmoil of his thought, rest from the torment of the world, recurs in all his works. It gives his graceful lyrics a poignancy that pierces the artificiality of their Horatian manner. He sought for happiness and tranquillity of spirit, but his temperament made it impossible for him to achieve them. They count him among the mystics. He never experienced the supernatural blessings which solace those that pursue the Mystic Way. He never acquired that aloofness from the things of the world that characterises them. He had an anxious longing for a rapture his uneasy nature prevented him from ever enjoying. He was a mystic only in so far as he was a poet. He looked at those snowcapped mountains and yearned to explore their mysteries, but he was held back

by the busy affairs of the city. I always think that the phrase of his, *no se puede vivir sin amar*, "one cannot live without loving," had for him an intimate, tragic meaning. It was not just a commonplace.

Fray Luis had something of the universal capacity that we wonder at in certain figures of the Italian Renaissance. He was a mathematician, an astrologer, and a jurist. Untaught, he acquired considerable proficiency as a painter. He was not only deeply versed in theological literature, but also in the classics, and their dreams of the Golden Age never ceased to haunt him. His verse, as I have suggested, has something more than distinction, and I think all judges admit that nobody in Spain ever wrote prose so perfectly. Pen in hand, Fray Luis was a scholar and a gentleman; he wrote with elegance, rather than with vigour. In *La Perfecta Casada* he quotes at length from Tertullian and even in the translation you can hardly fail to see how much more vivid, racy, and virile was the African writer. But even a foreigner cannot but be sensible to the charm of Luis de Leon's liquid prose. It is as clear as the rivulet that runs through La Flecha. It is eloquent and at the same time colloquial; it is concise and yet abundant. It has a grave, playful music. To my cheerful mind the most attractive and diverting book of Fray Luis is *The Perfect Wife*. The reader interested neither in theology nor in mysticism can read it with entertainment. It offers sage counsel to a bride on her conduct in the various necessities of the married state. One cannot help feeling a certain amused astonishment at its curious mixture of simplicity, shrewdness, and nobility. Incidentally it gives a pleasant glimpse of domestic life in the upper class and a hint here and there of circumstances which the conventional view of Spanish society would never have led you to suspect. Fray Luis was a Castilian gentleman of excellent family and his ideal of the good life was that of the landowner living on the produce of his estate. He does not seem to have considered the possibility that men might be born so unhappily as to have no broad acres to till. He had only scorn for such as engaged in commerce; it was not only disreputable, but gravely prejudicial to the soul's well-being. "The life of the field," he says, "and the cultivation of one's inheritance is a school of innocence and truth because one learns from those with whom one works and talks. And as the earth renders faithfully what is entrusted to it, and in its unchangeableness is stable and downright, bountiful in its fruits and generous of its riches,

liberal and productive to well-doing; so it seems to engender and to impress in the breasts of them that work it a peculiar goodness and a simplicity of temper such as are found with difficulty in men of other kinds. So it teaches sincerity, true and faithful dealing, and keeps in remembrance the good old customs."

The longest chapter is devoted to an attack, supported by abundant quotations from the classics and the Fathers, on the unaccountable mania the women of his day had for dyeing their hair and painting their cheeks. (He thought, the good monk, that the beauty of a good woman resided not in the lineaments of her face, but in the secret virtues of her soul; and he was not sure that it became the perfect wife to be fair and lovely.) He admitted that not all women who painted had evil intentions. "It is politeness to think so," he remarks dryly. But if this mask on the face did not discover their bad desires, at all events it aroused those of their neighbours. This is how virtuous women should perform their toilet: "Let them hold out their hands and receive in them water poured from a jar, which their servant will pour from the washing-stand, and let them put it to their faces, and take some of it in their mouths and wash their gums, and rub their fingers over their eyes and in their ears, and behind the ears also, and let them not desist till their whole face is clean; and after that, letting the water be, let them cleanse themselves with a rough towel, and so will they remain more beautiful than the sun."

There is one chapter that is headed: "How important it is that women should not talk much and that they should be peaceable and of a gentle disposition." In this he has a phrase so modern that it makes one smile; he remarks that a "foolish and chattering woman, as foolish women generally are, whatever other merits she has, is an intolerable business." Further on he observes that the peculiarity of stupidity is that it is not aware of itself but contrariwise takes itself for wisdom. "And whatever we do it will be the greatest difficulty to instil common sense (into persons of this sort), for that is something you learn ill if you do not learn it with your mother's milk. . . . And the best advice we can give to such women is to beg them to hold their tongues; since there are few wise women they should aim at there being many silent ones." Before I leave this engaging work I should like to give an extract from the chapter entitled: "On the obligation of married couples to love one another and to assist one another in their labours." It is a quotation from St. Basil. "The viper, the most ferocious

animal among reptiles, assiduously goes out to espouse the sea-lamprey and, having arrived, whistles, as though to give the signal that he is there, and attract her from the sea so that he may take her in his marital embrace. The lamprey obeys and rejoins the poisonous and savage beast without fear. What do I say to this? What? That however harsh and of savage qualities the husband may be, it is necessary for the wife to put up with it and that she should not allow peace to be disturbed for any cause."

That's talking, that is.

No one has ever thought even of beatifying Fray Luis de Leon. He never attained the peace that rewards the saints. By way of contrast I will give now a brief account of one whose way of life shows pre-eminently how mighty was the force that inspired these Spaniards. This is St. Peter of Alcantara and here is what St. Teresa says of him in her autobiography:

"How good an example has God lately taken from us in the blessed Father Peter of Alcantara. The world is not able to endure such perfection. They say that our health is more feeble and that times have changed. This holy man was in our own time; his spirit was mighty and so he held the world beneath his feet. And though men may not go naked nor make such harsh mortifications as he did, there are many things, as I have said on other occasions, whereby they may trample on the world, and the Lord teaches them when he sees that courage is there. And how great was that which God gave to this saint of whom I am speaking to enable him to perform for seven and forty years the harsh mortifications that are known to all. I want to say something about it, for I know it is all true.

"He told me and another person from whom he kept little (me for the love he bore me, and this the Lord willed him to have in order to protect and encourage me at a time of great need, as I have said and will ever say) that for forty years, I think he said it was, he had slept only an hour and a half between day and night; and that this at the beginning was the most difficult mortification he performed, to conquer sleep; and in order to do it he always stood or knelt. When he slept, it was sitting up, his head resting against a little piece of wood driven into the wall. He could not have lain down even if he had wanted to because his cell, as is well known, was only four and a half feet long. During all those years he never put on his hood, however hot was the sun, or whatever the rain, nor anything on his feet, nor garment save a habit of

sackcloth, with nothing underneath, and this as tight as he could bear it, and a little cloak of the same stuff over it. He told me that in the great cold he took this off, and left the door and the little window of his cell open so that when he put on the cloak again and shut the door he might satisfy his body with the comfort of greater warmth. It was very usual for him to eat every third day. And he asked me why this astonished me, for it was very possible to anyone who accustomed himself to it. A companion of his told me that it happened to him to go a week without eating. This must have been when he was in prayer, for then he had great raptures and ecstasies of love for God, of which I was myself once a witness.

"In youth his poverty was extreme, and his mortification, for he told me that it had happened to him to live for three years in a house of his order without knowing a friar except by the sound of his voice; for he never raised his eyes; and so when he was obliged to go from place to place he did not know the way and had to follow the Fathers. This happened on journeys. Women he never looked at and that for many years. He told me that now it was all the same to him whether he saw them or not; but he was very old when I came to know him, and his weakness was so great, he seemed to be made of nothing but the roots of trees. With all this holiness he was very affable, though of few words, unless you asked him questions. His answers were very delightful, for he had an excellent understanding. I should like to say much more, but I am afraid you will ask what business I have to write this. I have written it with misgiving. And so I will leave the matter, only adding that he died as he had lived, preaching and admonishing his friars. When he saw his end approaching he said the psalm: *Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi*, and, kneeling down, died."

No wonder they were able to conquer half the world, these Spaniards, when they could so terribly conquer themselves.

XI

I WISH it had been to my purpose to write an essay on mysticism. It is a fruitful subject. I have but tried to set down a few things about certain devout persons that might help me to some understanding of the religious spirit that was more than a background, that was the framework, in which the Spanish life of this particular

period pursued its variegated activity. I do not suppose that at any time in the world's history has religion entered so much into the common round of every day as in Spain just then. The main business of the Spaniard's life was his salvation. The picaroon heard Mass on his way to commit one of his mean crimes and the pimp, the blackmailer, the hired bravo when he was wounded in a fray cried frantically for a priest to shrive him. Don Juan himself, the scoffer, when the statue's fiery grip fastened on him begged for a brief respite that he might make his peace with God. The Spaniards of the Golden Age looked upon the Catholic Church as the country of their souls; it inspired them indeed with the emotion made up of pride and affection, trust and nostalgia, which Dr. Johnson described as the last refuge of a scoundrel.

But by this time I thought I had gathered together sufficient material for my purpose. In the course of my reading I had collected a number of incidents to give movement to my narrative and I had on the brink of my consciousness a variety of personages who only awaited their call to take part in its action. Nothing remained for me but to sit down and start writing. Then a very unfortunate thing happened to me. Finding myself once in Cadiz I went to the picture gallery. It is on the first floor of an old palace, rather shabby, not at all extensive, and most of the pictures are by modern Spanish painters. They are deplorable. But in one room is a collection of pictures by Zurbaran which have been removed from the Carthusian monastery near Jerez. Zurbaran is not a painter for whom many people feel enthusiasm. You have to know him well, and study him, to realise how remarkable an artist he was. He had power, and that is a quality you seldom find in painters. But this is not the place to say much of him and my immediate business is only with these portraits. They purport to be portraits of various personages whose piety illustrated the Carthusian order; it seems probable that they are in fact portraits, and one would say speaking likenesses, of the monks who were in the monastery when Zurbaran went there to paint the pictures that were to adorn its walls. They are painted with the tightness that characterised him. Those white robes do not seem made of wool, but of a material as rigid as baize, and the folds have none of the yielding quality of stuff; they might be carved in wood. But the harshness, the stiffness, of the manner gives you rather a curious feeling. It may be repellent, but it does not leave you indifferent. There is something very impressive about this series of Carthusian

saints and beatified monks. One, representing the Blessed John Houghton, strangely moved me. I could not but believe that it was an English monk and not a Spanish one that had been the model of this great-souled Englishman of whom his biographer says that he was shy in look, modest in manner, sweet in speech, chaste in body, humble of heart, amiable and beloved by all. There was here the well-bred refinement, the clear-cut, delicately beautiful features that you sometimes find in a certain sort of Englishman of gentle birth. The hair, the little of it that was left round the shaven skull, seemed to be of a reddish brown. For a moment I asked myself idly who was this unknown compatriot that had wandered so far from his native country to the monastery in Andalusia and, obedient to his Superior, sat to the painter for a portrait of another Englishman.

It was a face of great distinction, thin as though from long fasting, and with a tension that was restless and eager. On the cheeks was a hectic flush. The skin was darker than ivory, though with the warmly supple hue of ivory and paler than olive, yet with something of that colour's morbid delicacy. One wasted hand was clasped to his breast and in the other he held a bleeding heart. Round his neck, fastened by a knot, was a knotted rope.

I could not get the face out of my mind. Months passed, a year, two years, and the character that gradually acquired substance to undergo the adventures and suffer the experiences for which I had made these studies took on the ascetic features, the thin, suffering, eager, and ecstatic look of that unknown monk. He had the same spiritual air and his eyes in just the same way were intent on an ineffable mystery. I thought nothing of it; but when I came to close quarters with my subject I saw that this was not the sort of man to do at all. In the first place this was not a man of robust humour. I suspected that before entering religion he had had some sense of it, but of a thin, donnish kind that found a false quantity very ridiculous and in his moments of abandon led him to make witty quotations from Virgil. I could see him smile dryly, and a trifle superciliously, I could not imagine that he ever laughed out loud. I could imagine that he was capable of love, but not of sensuality, and if he fell in love it would be tragically. I could see him eating his heart out for some light woman to whose worthlessness his idealism blinded him, or in tortured silence for honour or God renouncing a happiness that was his for the asking. I could not see him tumbling a serving wench on a bed or deceiving

the jealous lover of a pretty actress. I thought it possible that he would with pleasure converse with Lope de Vega on the intricacies of versification, but he would consider the drama no more than the entertainment of the vulgar. He would pass through the student's life at Salamanca without communication with any but a few serious and high-born gentlemen and I think he would only despise the Horatian nostalgia of the petulant Luis de Leon. If he read the picaresque novels it would be as an idle pastime. He was not curious to see for himself the life they described. He left that to his lackeys. With his courtly manners he kept the busy, bustling, sordid, and picturesque world at arm's length.

Such a person was not of the least use to me. I set myself to think of another. I wanted someone gay, intelligent but urbane, with a lively sense of humour, religious of course, but with a spark of scepticism, eager for adventure and interested in all the ideas he came across, a man who could make himself at home in any company, as much at his ease discussing the modern drama with the poets as making merry with the players or carousing with picaroons, a man who could tell a good story, make love to a pretty woman, draw his sword at a slight, hold his own in diplomatic intrigue, and yet hankered, wistful and reluctant, for the beauty the mystics told of. I did not think there would be any difficulty in fashioning a youth to suit my purpose. I liked the idea of his having reddish hair and the ivory-olive skin that sometimes goes with it. I gave him the thin face, the eager eyes, the clear-cut features that would correspond with his love of art and his interest in the things of the spirit. I did not want him too big and beefy, for that suggested a coarseness of disposition that was not in my idea of him; I wanted him to be elegant in appearance and well-proportioned, slender but strong, with the beautiful, long hands that El Greco would have been so charmed to paint. And when I had done with him I discovered to my dismay that I had described over again the white-robed Carthusian who sat for the portrait of the Blessed John Houghton. I began once more. The same thing happened to me; I left it for a while; I went back to it; it was no good; try as I would it was impossible for me to see him with any lineaments but those of that confounded monk. One might have supposed that an author could give a character any traits, physical and mental, that he chose. It is not so. The author does not create a character, at all events it is not his awareness that creates him; on the contrary he creates himself, it may be as in this case

from a picture, it may be from the recollection of someone seen in the street or in past time known; and then his distinctive features grow round him, coming, I suppose, from the depths of the author's subconscious but without any impulse of his will. Once there, the author can do nothing but accept him. He cannot, without making him unreal, change the colour of his hair or the shape of his mouth. The man is what he is because he is exactly so tall, and he will do such and such a thing and feel such and such an emotion because he has just that look in his eyes. Pascal said that it would have changed the history of the world if Cleopatra's nose had been longer; he might have added that it would have changed too the plausible harmony which was her character. I was obliged to face the fact that the protagonist of the book I had in mind to write could be none other than this unknown monk. But this made it a book that I very well knew I could not write. It was not even a book that it much interested me to write. It would be somewhat excessively cultured, a trifle anæmic, and to me certainly of no particular significance.

I struggled a little, but it availed me nothing. The hound of heaven pursued me. My character had killed my story. I resigned myself at last and made up my mind not to write my book after all. I was disappointed, because I had worked at it desultorily for years and with application for three; I had read between two and three hundred books. I could only console myself by thinking that perhaps they had been of profit to me. The author cannot improve himself by a deliberate effort, for as I grow older I am more and more convinced that it is not he that writes but what they call his subconscious, and his aim must be to train and to enrich this in every way he can. This, I think, he can do by taking thought. There are some words of St. Teresa that can hardly fail to echo in the artist's heart: "I am like one who hears a voice from afar off," she says, "but although hearing the voice cannot distinguish the words; for at times I do not understand what I say, yet it is the Lord's pleasure that it should be well said, and if at times I talk nonsense that is because it is natural to me to make a mess of everything." I cannot believe that my long wandering through the Spanish country of to-day and through the spiritual country of the Golden Age, tedious as this sometimes was, has left me entirely as I was before. It has seemed to me that perhaps a reader here and there might be interested in the simple story of my journey.

Now among the books I read was one which had really nothing to do with me, for it was an account of a pilgrimage made to various holy places by an Armenian bishop at the end of the fifteenth century, and this was a hundred years before the period with which I was concerned. But I saw the title in a bibliography and it excited my curiosity. It was *Relation d'un Voyage fait en Europe*. It was published in Paris in 1827 and the translation is by a Monsieur J. Saint Martin. It is a slim book, rather musty, its pages stained by time, and the French and the Armenian face one another. It begins with these words—I translate from the French:

"I, Martyr, but only by name, born at Arzendjan, and bishop, living in the hermitage of Saint Chiragos at Norkiegh (the new village) had long wished to visit the tomb of the holy prince of the Apostles. When the time had come for me, unworthy though I was, to deserve this honour, which I never ceased to desire, without however ever having made known to anyone the intention in my heart, I went forth from my monastery on the twenty-ninth of October in the year 938 of the Armenian Era. Travelling by short stages, I arrived at Stamboul. There by the grace of God I found a ship on which I embarked with the deacon Verthanes."

The date mentioned corresponds to 1489 of our era. It was on the third of August 1492 that Christopher Columbus set sail from Palos to discover a new route to the Indies.

I think he must have been a remarkable man, Martyr, Bishop of Arzendjan. Arzendjan was a busy and populous city and Euphrates, the famous river, ran through it. It was in a plain, rich with orchards and vineyards, surrounded by hills in which dwelt wild tribes subject to no authority. In the Euphrates, not far from the city, St. Gregory the Illuminator baptised the Armenian King and the nobles of his court; an event the results of which were very unfortunate for the Armenians and highly embarrassing to the Concert of Europe. The Bishop made his way to Rome and here the Pope gave him a letter of recommendation which was of great service to him on his arduous journey. He made his way north and at Bâle he and his companion, the deacon Verthanes, were arrested as spies. He makes no comment on their release, following the course of the Rhine they reached Cologne, where they saw the tombs of the Three Kings. When they got to Flanders, being unacquainted with the language, they had great difficulty in making themselves understood. For the same reason they found themselves in a quandary when they came to England,

and he says nothing of it but that the English were fish-eaters. But on reaching Paris, where he lodged at an inn, he cries: "What man could describe the beauty of this city! It is a very great and splendid city." That is farther than he goes often, for mostly he only tells how he went from place to place and what shrines he visited. He tells you nothing of the people he meets. It is the dryest reading possible and yet you read on because you have a sense of the man's indomitable courage. In Paris the deacon left him. He sought for another companion, but could, it appears, find no one willing to share the risks and hardships of the way. "Putting my trust then in the prayers of St. James and in Almighty God I continued my journey in great affliction." No dangers daunt him. He endures cold and hunger. Going on foot, by himself, a man no longer young, he accepts without a murmur whatsoever befalls him. When he arrives at a town he is entertained in a monastery, but if he finds himself in the open country he is prepared to sleep on the bare ground. He travelled through a multitude of towns, being received everywhere with great honour, and at St. Sebastian the host of the inn and his wife treated him with boundless charity. It is the only good that I have ever read of a Spanish innkeeper. Two collections were made on his behalf, for whatever money he started with must have been long since spent. Of St. Sebastian he says, very surprisingly: "I did not see a pretty face in this town." And at last, very tired and weak, but sustained by the help of God, he came to the famous city where St. James had chosen his last resting place.

"I approached this tomb; I adored it, my face to the earth, and I besought the remission of my sins, those of my father and mother, and those of my benefactors. At last I accomplished, with a great effusion of tears, what was the desire of my heart."

Then he started on his homeward journey.

He arrived at a place he calls Getharia, a port on the coast of Guipuzcoa. It was now 1494. He had been on the road for five years. It was but twelve months since Christopher Columbus had returned to Palos; he had found not what he sought, but a new world. Now I go on with the Bishop's narrative:

"I found in that place a great ship which they told me was of sixty tons burthen. I addressed myself to the priests to say that I should be taken to this ship; 'I cannot go on foot any more,' I said, 'my strength is all gone.' They were surprised that I could have come on foot from a country so far away. They went to see

the captain of the ship: 'This Armenian religious,' they said to him, 'begs you to take him in your ship: he has come from a far country and he is unable to return by land.' They read him the Pope's letter; he listened to it and said: 'I will take him in my ship; but tell him that I go to range the universal sea, that my ship carries no merchant, and that all the men who are in her are engaged in her service. As for us, we have made the sacrifice of our lives; we place our hope only in God, and we believe that, whithersoever fortune carries us, God will save us. We go to rove the world and it is not possible for us to tell where the winds will carry us. But God knows. For the rest, if it is your wish also to come with us, it is very well; come in my ship, and do not concern yourself with bread, nor with food or drink. For whatever else you need, it is your business, these religious will see to it; since we have a soul, we will provide you with biscuit and all else that God has vouchsafed us.' "

For sixty-eight days the intrepid Bishop sailed the unknown seas. Contrary winds drove them hither and thither and they came at last to the town, "which is at the end of the world". They had been so buffeted by violent storms and the great ship so shaken, they were obliged to make their way back to Cadiz for repairs. Here he left her and went on a pilgrimage to Santa Maria de Guadalupe. It was not till Lent in 1496 that he arrived once more in Rome. This is how he ends his narrative: "I then went to Santa Maria, where I took ship and I again endured such misfortunes that I would have preferred death rather than suffer so many dangers."

But it is not for his own sake that I have written this of Martyr, Bishop of Arzendjan, though I do not think it is wasted time to consider for a little a good and a brave man. It is for the speech that the unknown captain of the ship made him when he asked for a passage, and I like to think that the Armenian Bishop thought it a fine speech too, for in the course of his book it is the only one he reports. He mentions only and does not describe his meetings with the sundry of the great. For my part I think it is as fine a speech as any that Thucydides gave to the famous men of Greece whose history he wrote. I suppose no one will ever know the name of this sea-captain, who, putting his trust in God, in a craft we know how frail, set out to sail the universal sea. His words have the heroic ring. I like to think that Bishop Martyr, "by name only", recognised in him a kindred soul. He too, the unknown

captain, was a dedicated priest, but to high adventure, and he too had a fearless heart.

And if I am not mistaken here is the secret of the greatness that was Spain. In Spain it is men that are the poems, the pictures, and the buildings. Men are its philosophies. They lived, these Spaniards of the Golden Age; they felt and did; they did not think. Life was what they sought and found, life in its turmoil, its fervour and its variety. Passion was the seed that brought them forth and passion was the flower they bore. But passion alone cannot give rise to a great art. In the arts the Spaniards invented nothing. They did little in any of those they practised but give a local colour to a virtuosity they borrowed from abroad. Their literature, as I have ventured to remark, was not of the highest rank; they were taught to paint by foreign masters, but, inapt pupils, gave birth to one painter only of the very first class; they owed their architecture to the Moors, the French, and the Italians, and the works themselves produced were best when they departed least from their patterns. Their pre-eminence was great, but it lay in another direction: it was a pre-eminence of character. In this I think they have been surpassed by none and equalled only by the ancient Romans. It looks as though all the energy, all the originality, of this vigorous race had been disposed to one end and one end only, the creation of man. It is not in art that they excelled, they excelled in what is greater than art—in man. But it is thought that has the last word.